

Myth and Symbol I

Symbolic phenomena in ancient Greek culture

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Attic black figure vase by Sophilos, early sixth century
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Myth and Symbol I

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Papers from the first international symposium
on symbolism at the University of Tromsø, June 4-7, 1998

Edited by

Synnøve des Bouvrie

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Foreword

THE PRESENT volume is the result of a joint effort of a group of scholars who felt the need to discuss the nature of what is commonly labelled 'myth,' all being actively engaged in the interpretation of concrete expressions of ancient, mostly Greek, culture. Despite the fact that two centuries of scholarly debate have passed and wonderful progress has been made in interpreting specific manifestations of 'myth' during the last 25 or so years, there still exists a palpable reluctance to define 'myth' in a clear and concise way. A recently held congress on the theme of ancient myth did not address the problem at all. It is within this situation we felt the necessity to address the crucial question of definition within a comparative framework. The result was a symposium held at the University of Tromsø in the midnight sun of 1998. It was not our aim to endorse once more some ethnocentric belief in the universal existence of a category of tales, 'myths,' but on the contrary, to discuss the problem and examine the various assumptions and questions that have dominated the study of 'Greek myths.' We wished to examine why the question of definition has ended in an impasse, and to discuss different possible approaches to phenomena we meet in large quantities within our field. Our discussions have been an extraordinarily exhilarating and invigorating experience, but regrettably this part of our cooperation has not been rendered in the volume. On the other hand, we hope that readers without being coloured by our views and preferences, in turn will engage in similar inspiring discussions and pose new questions. The phenomenon of 'myth,' which we profitably may conceive of as a manifestation of what in recent time has been called 'symbolism,' is, after all, a deeply human activity.

A word of explanation is required for the extensive article on the definition of myth. It was attached to the editor's invitation to the Tromsø symposium and a number of the participants later urged this common starting point to be included into our collection of papers. The contributions have not been ordered in any

systematic way, nor do we pretend to offer an exhausting range of approaches. In the light of the current reluctance to define and speak about a phenomenon like 'myth,' we have felt it necessary to identify and name certain human tendencies to create shared perceptions and to generate cultural forces. Most papers have engaged in examining specific tales belonging to the well known corpus of 'Greek myths,' either manifested in narrative (Aronen, Bruit Zaidman) or in imagery (Hoffmann), while others have explored symbolic tales (Svenbro) and iconography (Marinatos). Some have traced a tale's wanderings to distant regions and foreign recipients, exploring these new encounters (Bremmer, Nielsen, Simonsuuri). Others again have emphasised the workings (Hoffmann) or contexts of mythical traditions in order to meet the living community and the multifarious manifestations of mythical or symbolic expression (Georgoudi, Endsjø, des Bouvrie, Ellinger).

Herbert Hoffmann investigates the levels of meaning and especially the modes of use in fifth-century society of a drinking cup decorated with the myth of Polyidos and Glaukos. He concludes that the various aspects of the tale and the imagery point to mystic belief and initiation.

Jaakko Aronen explores the morphology of mythical tales and concludes that genealogical structures serve subtle aims of a community's conceptual organisation of the world and its value systems.

A related problem is raised by Stella Georgoudi, who addresses the figure of Gaia or Gê. Unlike modern ideas of Mother Earth, the Greek perception of Gaia did not convey general notions of fertility but structured the individual's orientation in his or her social world.

Jan Bremmer's analysis of the Polyphemos myth demonstrates not only how elements of the tale are widely distributed in folk traditions but are also interwoven with other tales, and how they may point to common origins in ritual.

Nannó Marinatos proposes in her paper to assume an encoded cultural communication at work in the corpus of shield strap motifs from the archaic age, concluding that these generic and mythical motifs constituted a coherent norm system valid among their carriers.

Marjatta Nielsen offers a twofold analysis of symbolic expressions in Etruscan iconography, which covers a wide time span and explores the principles governing the choice and employment of generic and Greek mythical imagery.

Louise Bruit Zaidman investigates the various mythical strands meeting in the tragedy of Alcestis and offers a way to understand the drama through its structuring of the mythical complex and its interaction with contemporary perceptions of the human condition and central social values.

Bruce Lincoln's paper discusses some basic properties of mythical narrative, emphasising their taxonomic but also dynamic and ideological nature. Presenting a model for analysing such narrative Lincoln applies it to a Platonic tale.

Dag Øistein Endsjø studies Greek notions of the geographical periphery and poses the question whether these concepts of space should not be understood as images of the liminal state in myth and ritual.

Kirsti Simonsuuri's contribution on the Sisyphos tale covers a vast time span, exploring the polysemic nature of the myth and its capacity to both retain patterns of interpretation as well as inspire new generations to express their experiences through this medium.

Jesper Svenbro argues for the proposition that objects and names may generate mythical narrative, offering examples in a study of the Orpheus myth as well as a Herodotean narrative that reveals an implied cultural message.

Synnøve des Bouvrie presents a theoretical framework for the interpretation of mythic drama, suggesting that the shock and horror of the drama are to be understood at the level of central cultural symbols, illustrating her model with the example of the warrior symbol.

Pierre Ellinger examines the apparently enigmatic apparitions of certain deities in the context of wars and battles. Analysing the details of the historical reports he finds a subtle logic behind these major symbolic figures.

This publication as well as the symposium that was its source have been made possible due to the generous support from the Norwegian Research Council and the University of Tromsø.

For abbreviations of the ancient authors' names, the reader should consult the list in the Oxford Classical Dictionary, 3rd edition, and for the abbreviations of periodicals, the list in *L'Année philologique*.

Synnøve des Bouvrie
Bergen, August 2002

The definition of myth. Symbolical phenomena in ancient culture

Synnøve des Bouvrie

Introduction

THE PRESENT article aims at making a contribution to the definition of myth as well as to the discussion about the substance of what is commonly referred to as 'myth.' It does not pretend to give the final answer to all questions related to this intricate problem, but to offer some clarification at the present moment, when the term 'myth' is freely in use among classical scholars without always being sufficiently defined. In fact the question of definition seems indeed to be avoided. In addressing this question I will proceed along two lines and study the nature and 'existence' of myth from a social as well as from a biological point of view. We have to ask how 'myth' operates in the particular culture we are studying, and to consider how the human mind does in fact function in a special 'mythical' way, studying its relationship to conscious reasoning. By adducing insights from anthropological theory I hope to contribute to the definition of the term and by presenting some results from psychology I wish to substantiate the claim that 'mythical phenomena' can be said to be generated by some 'mythical mind.' Both answers amount to the conclusion that 'myth' does in fact exist, if we study what I provisionally call 'myth' as a subspecies of what commonly is labelled 'symbolic phenomena.' This term refers to processes and entities which constitute a complex force in the creation and maintenance of culture.

My justification for these choices is the situation that within our field of classical studies we are deprived of studying phenomena like 'myth' within their living context. This condition may prompt us more easily to project our own scholarly habits of documenting and conscious arguing on the object of our study, thereby distorting the phenomena or denying their existence altogether. However, by making serious attempts at countering these unwanted effects of our own activity, we may become more aware of the nature of 'myth.'

I do not claim to present radically new insights, in fact they are established discourses within the fields to which I refer. However, these insights do not seem to

be sufficiently incorporated into our classical studies, which, unfortunately, are bound forever to study the cooled vestiges of living cultures.¹ It is my wish to bring in some life or third dimension into a research field that is working within the deserted space of art and the two-dimensional world of paper. In addition I will discuss a few concrete examples, hoping to stimulate renewed discussion and further investigation.

Terminology and ontological status

Before starting on the vexed question of definition, I wish to make some preliminary statements. Some scholars within our field of classical studies are so dissatisfied with the general application of the term 'myth' so as to deny the existence of 'myth' as a distinctive social phenomenon as well as that of 'mythical thought.' However, the situation that has led them to these conclusions, I think, has partly been due to our imprecise distinctions and loose terminology, partly to insufficient attention given to the nature of the phenomena involved. I will make this clear in the following discussion.

Marcel Detienne, discussing the development of mythological studies, points to the ethnocentric bias in the distinction between 'fable' and enlightened discourse in early Western research on 'mythology,' which understood itself as 'une science du scandaleux.'² He has rightly pointed to the inacceptability of Western habits of relegating stories presented by 'the natives' to 'myth' while accepting our own religious and other tales as 'the truth,' thus separating the grotesque from the sensible, the immoral from the moral. 'L'anthropologue est un homme des frontières: entre les sauvages et les civilisés, entre l'enfance de l'humanité et son âge adulte, entre nous et nos ancêtres.'³ This attitude is of course nothing but an instance of the universal (?) habit of confronting the 'other' vs. the 'self,' combined with a Western 'colonial mentalité' of assuming a fundamental segregation between the culture of 'the natives' and our Western, contemporary, 'enlightened' world.⁴ The use of the term 'myth' in this sense, a category for defining other people as less developed is of course inherent in Wilhelm von Nestle's 'Vom Mythos zum Logos' concept.⁵ It is also prominent in the work of G. S. Kirk.⁶

- 1 Cf. the anthropologist Gill 1982:37 'We have shown that much of the significance of artifacts is inseparable from the context of the cultural and religious processes and associated beliefs and principles from which they rise ... Now we should see that commonly these objects come about as a result of human actions which are creative in the primary sense, that is, in the sense of bearing cosmic responsibilities, in the sense of making life possible.'
- 2 Detienne 1981:36 (1986:13), reviewed from an anthropological viewpoint by Traube 1986.
- 3 Detienne 1981:45 (1986:19), 'The anthropologist is a frontiersman. Between savages and the civilized, between the childhood of mankind and its maturity, between ourselves and our ancestors.'
- 4 Ohnuki-Tierney 1990:2.

Recently Claude Calame, agreeing with Detienne, has formulated the problem as follows: '... myth is not an entity with any ontological existence, but rather a Western category which originated in the early days of anthropological thought, during the Enlightenment. As a spatially and temporally marked tool of classification, the category "myth" is generated by the act of looking at the cultures of others from a Eurocentric perspective ...'⁷

Earlier, Calame expressed himself in the same vein, 'Définitions [of myth] si larges ... ne font que démasquer le fait qu'il n'y a pas *d'essence* ni du mythe ni de la mythologie (emphasis added).'⁸ The question whether 'myth' is only a fiction of Western or Eurocentric culture, I think, should be reformulated into a discussion about our justification (or moral right?) to qualify as 'myth' what 'natives' recognise as 'nature' (a short-hand for metaphysical, historical, social, biological or whatever reality, cf. Pettazzoni 1947-48, referred by Lincoln 1983:76). In other words the question whether or not 'myth' is nothing more than a Western fiction amounts to the question whether we as academics may make meta-statements about 'native' expressions, that is, whether the category of 'myth' is an academic fiction or not. I do not think this is so, unless most of Western science is seen as an academic fiction too, an imposition of secular analysis on what is seen as sacred by (some, most?) other cultures. However, if we include Westerners and academics among the 'natives,' I think we can confidently proceed to study 'myth' as a phenomenon with an ontological status, although it is an elusive one, due in fact to its special nature, a problem to which I shall return.⁹

The suspicion Calame throws on looking at the cultures of others from a Eurocentric perspective is in fact the dilemma of the study of myth. It can in fact hardly be studied otherwise than by looking at the cultures of others, which implies that

- 5 Nestle 1966:6 'Diesen Weg vom Mythos zum Logos zu gehen, aus der Unmündigkeit zur Mündigkeit des Geistes emporzuwachsen, scheint den arischen Völkern als denen der höchstbegabten Rasse vorbehalten geblieben zu sein.'
- 6 Kirk 1970:24 'Why should we not say instead, for instance, that the association of myths and rituals in certain social conditions is due to the propensity of men, especially in uninhibited and savage societies, for acting out any event or description whatever, whether real or fictitious?' Kirk 1974:15f., '[the Cambridge School] rightly perceived that Greek myths are not utterly removed from savage ones as a kind of superior species.'
- 7 Calame 1996b:23. Cf. Calame 1999:121 'We recognize myth as a notion of modern Western anthropological thought.' Calame has expressed scepticism as to the motives for identifying an entity 'myth.' Calame 1988:10 'De tels concepts [myth and mythology] n'ont pu s'imposer que dans une pensée anthropologique encore fortement marquée par la croyance au primitif, et par conséquent à l'irrationalité d'une pensée humaine au seuil de son développement.'
- 8 Calame 1988:9.
- 9 Detienne's refusal to accept the notion of myth, has been countered by Brisson 1982, 1998, who has attempted a definition of myth according to formal properties of the tale.

people belonging to other than European cultures will be best qualified to point to the myths of our cultures, or that Western scholars have to defamiliarise themselves thoroughly from their culture in order to study 'their own native myths.' While dissociating ourselves, then, from previous views of myth, we should realise that earlier bias in those studies does not necessarily render studies of 'myth' altogether suspect.

Furthermore Calame points to the fact that the Greeks lacked a term for what we identify as 'myth.'¹⁰ However, this fact that the Greek term 'muthos' (μῦθος) does not refer to a distinct category of tales among the (early) Greeks, does not need to halt us either. There were some expressions which referred to what many would call 'myth,' the great exploits of ancestors, heroes and demi-gods, understood as belonging to the more or less remote past. The terminology which the Greeks could apply to this past was *ta palaia* (τὰ παλαιά), 'the ancient [things, events].'¹¹ What is interesting about this term is that it does not refer to a particular kind of tales, but to certain events, which underscores their status as reality. About these events, according to a wide-spread opinion, it was difficult to achieve firm knowledge, and poets are often accused of making up a story because of this lack of precise knowledge. This does not imply that the basic truth of the existence of gods and heroes is being denied.¹² The absence of a term for 'myth' may be due to the elusive nature of the phenomena in question. It may in fact be an encouraging sign of the serious status of the tale. We need then not be alarmed by this lack of a native vocabulary for what we would call 'myth,' since there may still be phenomena that should be distinguished systematically from discursive and argumentative speech. This does not mean that we are returning to a primitive or irrational man, only that we are trying to understand tales, that for the Greeks in fact were 'the truth,' from an exterior perspective.

Calame however has split his objections to the concept of 'myth' into an ethical and an intellectual part:

10 Calame 1988:9; Calame 1991:181; Calame 1999:122, 131f.

11 Calame 1991; Calame 1996a:39. We meet expressions as ἔργα, πράξεις, deeds of our forefathers' as well, e.g. Isoc., *Paneg.* 59, *Panath.* 151, who chooses to begin his account at a more remote time (πορρωτέρωθεν 120) referring to 'πράξεις περὶ τῶν προγόνων,' when presenting events at the time of Theseus (175). Dem. *Epit.* lx [1391] 'πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ διεπράξαντο,' with the example of the battle against the Amazons (8), 'τάκείνων ἔργα' (9). In this context Demosthenes uses the expression 'οὐπω μεμυθολόγηται' as a parallel to being recorded in epic, that is 'not yet being recorded in poetic form,' distinguishing the deeds of the younger generations by the criterion of having taken place in a more recent age 'ὑπογυώτερ' εἶναι τοῖς χρόνοις' (9). On the question of native terminology see also Burkert 1979a:3 n.14. Lincoln 1997 focuses on the dynamic character of terms like 'logos' and 'mythos' and the way intellectuals strategically used one or the other to further their cause.

'If we abandon the 'essentialist' connotations of the category which we perhaps naively construct as 'myth,' then we restore to the narrative manifestations of sym-

- 12 E.g. Hesiod uses 'logos' for his tale about the primordial races (Hes. *Op.* 106), Pindaros contrasts the true 'logos' about Pelops with embellished 'muthoi' *Pi. Ol.* i:28f., Herodotos contrasting the historical epochs dividing king Minos (to us a figure of myth) and Polykrates, the ruler of Samos about 530 BC, tells that the latter lived 'in the human age. τῆς δὲ ἀνθρωπίνης λεγομένης γενεῆς' (Hdt. iii:122). The distinction seems to correspond to our distinction between prehistory and history. The historian Thoukydides is of the same conviction. 'We know by report that Minos was the most ancient person to acquire a naval power (Μίνως γὰρ παλαιάτατος ἂν ἀκοῆ ἴσμεν ναυτικὸν ἐκτήσατο' Thuc. i:4,1). He apologises for having presented a record which lacks τὸ μυθῶδες, 'the myth-like, poetically embellished? element,' (for the negative connotations in Isokrates see Papillon 1996:16), and therefore may be less attractive to the listener than truthful ('οὔτε ... ἐπὶ τὸ προσαγωγότερον τῇ ἀκροάσει ἢ ἀληθέστερον' Thuc. i:21,1 cf. i:22,4, where Thoukydides applies the term 'ἀγώνισμα,' which Sifakis 1997-98:27 translates as 'a piece for public performance in the immediate future; or, a composition to be presently performed in public'). However, he does not doubt the historicity of the Trojan war (Thuc. i: 3,3). Diodorus from Sicily, writing in the age of Augustus, discusses the difficulties of those who are composing ancient (hi)stories (Diod. Sic. iv:1, τὰς παλαιὰς μυθολογίας), due to the fact that 'the antiquity of that which is to be recorded makes it difficult to find out about them (ἡ μὲν γὰρ τῶν ἀναγραφόμενων ἀρχαιότης δυσέυρετος οὕσα πολλὴν ἀπορίαν παρέχεται τοῖς γράφουσιν), and causes much confusion to those who are writing, and the record of the dates (χρόνων) not admitting of the most accurate proof causes the readers of the (hi)story (τῆς ἱστορίας) to feel contempt [for it]. In addition the variety and the multitude of the heroes and demi-gods and the other men to be presented in genealogies makes the record difficult to arrive at. But the greatest and most baffling circumstance is the fact that those who have written down the most ancient events and stories (τὰς ἀρχαιοτάτας πράξεις τε καὶ μυθολογίας) are in disagreement among each other. For that reason the writers of greatest esteem among the later historians (ἱστοριογράφων) have given up the ancient record (τῆς μὲν ἀρχαίας μυθολογίας) due to the difficulty [of the task] and undertaken to write about more recent events (τὰς δὲ νεωτέρας πράξεις)'. Plato (*Resp.* 382c,d) underscores the fact that our knowledge of the gods and heroes (τῶν παλαιῶν) is imperfect (καὶ ἐν αἷς νυνδὴ ἐλέγομεν ταῖς μυθολογίαις, διὰ τὸ μὴ εἰδέναι ὅπη τάληθές ἔχει περὶ τῶν παλαιῶν, ἀφομοιοῦντες τῷ ἀληθεῖ τὸ ψεῦδος ὅτι μάλιστα, οὕτω χρήσιμον ποιούμεν ...). Discussing (*Resp.* 377de) the nature of false tales (μύθους ... ψευδεῖς), and the way people report badly or shamefully (κακῶς) about the gods and heroes, Plato (or Sokrates) uses the simile of a painter who does not succeed in drawing a proper likeness of his model, (ὡσπερ γραφεὺς μηδὲν εὐκότα γράφων οἷς ἂν ὅμοια βουληθῆ γράψαι) implying the existence of the model. Cf. Belfiore 1985:50, who argues that Platon primarily is concerned not with the factual deeds ascribed to the gods (about whom we do not know the truth), but with their nature (about which we know that it is nothing but good). Elsewhere Plato (or Sokrates *Leg.* 966c) argues 'Isn't it one of the most honourable things (καλλίστων) to know about the gods ... that they exist and what power they prove to possess as so far as a human being is in a position to know these things' (ὡς εἰσὶν τε καὶ ὅσης φαίνονται κύριοι δυνάμεως, εἰδέναι τε εἰς ὅσον δυνατὸν ἐστὶν ταῦτ' ἀνθρώπων γινώσκειν). Aristotle discussing the subject matter of tragedy (which for us belongs to the realm of Greek myth) states that the tragic poet should keep to this material, which he considers to belong to the realm of historical events (τῶν γενομένων ὀνομάτων *Poet.* 1451b15 ff.), cf. Veyne 1983.76f. (= 1988). Censorinus (*De natali* 21 Jahn) citing Varro, refers to the three epochs of history, the 'ἀδηλον' (the undemonstrable), the 'μυθικόν' (mythical/recorded in epic?) and the 'ἱστορικόν' (historical/recorded in genealogies etc.). For a survey of Greek criticism of myth see e.g. Dowden 1992:Ch. 3 'Greeks on Myth,' 9-53.

bolic thought their multiplicity of functions—among them, an *argumentative and then a rational one*’ (emphasis added).¹³

When Calame suggests that we should abandon the essentialist connotations of ‘myth’ so as to include *e.g.* the argumentative and rational functions (the “pragmatic” that is the rhetorical function’ Calame 1999:136f.) of ‘narrative manifestations of symbolic thought,’ he proposes to solve the problem while still clinging to some concrete tales (‘narrative manifestations’) or their nucleus.¹⁴ This is to propose that we should study the appearance and functions of some concrete tales, which we ‘perhaps naively’ have identified as myths or symbolic thought according to our common sense, or interest,¹⁵ a suggestion Calame may have adopted from Claude Lévi-Strauss, who stated ‘un mythe est perçu comme mythe par tout lecteur dans le monde entier’ (Claude Lévi-Strauss 1958:232, Traube 1986:82) This seems all well, except for the fact that in principle the question of identification is the fundamental one. Calame’s statement thus leaves open the problem what he means by the expression ‘symbolic thought.’ We cannot impressionistically single out some narratives without accounting for their inclusion into this category of ‘symbolic thought.’ My approach will be the opposite one, starting from a study of some ‘mythical’ or symbolic properties in order to identify tales (and other phenomena) that correspond to these criteria, whether they have been included into the category of ‘Greek myth’ or not. As will become clear, I will argue for the view that there are phenomena whose essence and functions are radically different from argumentative and rational thought.

Instead of denying the existence of ‘myth’ as Calame and Detienne do, we should acknowledge its ubiquitous existence, among the scandalous natives as well as among ourselves. I would thus suggest that we analyse Detienne’s and Calame’s proposition as two questions: whether particular tales labelled by us as ‘myth’ in fact are manifestations of the ‘symbolic’ phenomenon that will be defined as such, and whether there exists a particular ‘mythical thought, pensée mythique, mythisches Denken, pensiero mitico,’ a fact that is denied as well by Calame and Detienne.¹⁶

The present article is oriented by the thought that ‘myth’ or symbolic phenomena in general are universal, neither to be ashamed of nor to be despised, suspected or abolished.¹⁷ In addition, being an elusive phenomenon, ‘myth’ is—and here I

13 Calame 1996b:23.

14 Cf. Calame 1986:138 ‘une structure syntaxique nucléaire.’

15 Calame 1988:11f. ‘sens commun,’ ‘récits passionnants.’

16 Calame 1988:10 ‘... croire à l’existence d’une pensée mythique spécifique, c’est poursuivre le fantôme rousseauiste de l’Age d’or du prélogique.’ Cf. Calame’s paper at the Myth into Logos? conference in Bristol 1996b, 1999:140. During the discussions at this conference the same was indeed generally denied. Cf. the contrary view in Perrin and Pouillon 1988.

17 Traube 1986.

anticipate some of my conclusions—effective as long as it is not recognised as such.¹⁸ As soon as a ‘myth’ is ‘revealed’ as ‘myth,’ it ceases to be ‘the truth,’ the natural way of being and doing, the undiscussed and unquestioned. It is therefore hard to detect our own ‘truths,’ and all the more the more fundamental they are. Myth and ‘truth’ are complementary concepts, the same tale seen from the outside and the inside respectively.

There is a special reason for classicists to address the question of ‘myth,’ because of the still wide-spread idea that the ancient Greeks in fact abolished ‘*muthos*,’ substituting ‘*logos*’ for this ‘naive mere telling of tales.’ While the Greek version of ‘*logos*’ may be uniquely Greek, I assume that rationality is as universal a human faculty as is ‘myth.’¹⁹ There are thus several reasons for studying the nature of ‘myth’ in order to disentangle the term from everyday or prejudiced meanings and to clarify the concept as a scholarly tool of investigation.

At this stage I would signal two dangers that lie in our path: unawareness of our role as observers may distort our observation, and unreflected choice of scientific metaphors may impede our understanding. One example are terms of intellectual faculties, such as ‘mythical or symbolic *thought*,’ and I would suggest, that (perhaps a decisive) part of the difficulties that have arisen in our quest for the nature of myth may be due to a choice of descriptive terminology. A result of this terminology (or its cause) is that it virtually focuses upon the scholarly activity of observation, documenting and description, and its concomitant thinking. It imperceptibly exchanges the experience of the observer for the workings of the object of study in its living context. Another example is the terminology which draws its metaphors from the sphere of physics or from the visual arts. The very term ‘*l’imaginaire*,’ for example, suggests some static picture on a wall. Images of painting on canvas or a framework freeze the living tale into a substance passively absorbing the ideological system, a kind of knowledge which thus can be deciphered in its texture.²⁰ This prompts us to investigate the ‘meaning’ of a myth.

18 Cf. Jean-Pierre Vernant, cited by Ellinger 1984:22.

19 Edward Sapir, who was familiar with native Amerindian cultures, firmly states: ‘Anyone who has been in contact with natives knows, [unless he is so devoted to his prejudices as to pay no heed to his observations,] that the pre-logical mind does not exist in them. [At least, it does not exist in them more than in ourselves.] Modern man is just as illogical as primitive man in many respects—politics for example. The only difference [between primitive man and ourselves lies not in the processes of thinking but in the fact that] we appeal to more sophisticated supernatural beings [and that we have accumulated a larger store of technical knowledge]’ (Sapir 1994:211).

20 Calame 1988:148 ‘[une définition sémantique] dessine l’*arrière-fond* idéologique sur lequel se détache la narration,’ ‘Et cette étude du *cadre* culturel donnant un sens et organisant en un système les valeurs actualisées par la narration devrait être menée pour chaque récit du corps ...’ (149). We might prefer ‘symbolic *tone*’ referring to the field of music.

On the other hand, in attempts at defining myth or classifying tales the readily *observable*, reasonably enough, has been at the centre of interest. In order to capture some verifiable, that is commonly perceptible, features we have skipped the question whether the essence of 'myth' does yield to the demand for easily perceptible data. These have been assumed to be either semantic elements or a particular literary form or genre, which would constitute the basis for its definition, and prompted the search for some general narrative formula or plot structure.²¹ Kirk's energetic denial of the existence of some general form and function of myth is mostly due to this empirical approach, the demand that there should emerge some common denominator identifiable in the texts under scrutiny, preferably particular personae and plots. Or there should be found testimonia on ritual staging for all mythical stories. And when no such evidence was found it was concluded that no common feature is to be found.

However, our situation as observers is a problematic one. Firstly, being confronted with a complex phenomenon as 'myth,' there is always the difficulty of drawing a boundary between the object of study and one's own observation and we may risk making statements about ourselves rather than our object. For example, when discussing Ernst Cassirer's view of an 'association of myth with religion, ... the assumption that both involve a passionate response to the world ...,' Kirk dismisses this possibility with the argument that '... in hundreds of other myths [other than Gilgamesh and Genesis(!)] whether oral or literate, no special intensity is *detectable*' (emphasis added).²² When analysing the different functions of traditional tales, what Kirk describes as the properties of these tales, is very much what to him is readily observable and his (intellectual) reactions to the texts.²³

Secondly, as historians we have the duty to verify our statements by evidence, and we do not have access to anything else than a piece of flat paper, which manifests itself as a wall or a picture, corresponding to the 'wall' on which we attach our scholarly comments. Still we should remain aware of the fact that this is not the real object. To deny some 'mythical' entity or properties on the basis of the material conditions of our sources (and the observer's reactions to that) is like making statements on the behaviour of animals from a photograph. We as classical philologists are not witnessing living tales, not the vibrant telling situation (nor are we the recipients).²⁴

21 Calame 1988:9.

22 Kirk 1970:30f.

23 Kirk 1970:253ff. 'The first type is primarily narrative and entertaining; the second operative, iterative, and validatory; and the third speculative and explanatory ... myths [that] belong to the second type—they glorify famous leaders ...'

24 By way of contrast see the model investigation by Geertz 1974.

Traditional tales are to be studied in their living environment, their 'mythical' quality may be that special feeling in the members of the audience then and there, something withdrawn from our library observation. At this stage I would remind of the fact that tales, whatever their genre, are not only received at the intellectual level, they rouse emotions as well, which should be included in an interpretation. The problem I have signalled, then, may be the dilemma of 'the empirical scientist, who limits his area of inquiry to those data which are verifiable by empirically testable methods,' while anthropological research uses several explanatory models beyond pure description.²⁵

In particular when studying the elusive category of 'myth,' what really matters is the natives' reception, their experience, their reactions to the tale.²⁶ This reception includes their culturally structured perception of the world, a structure which has of course been studied extensively. But structure being again an abstraction, it answers primarily the observer's need for order, while not exhaustively accounting for the participants' experience and active creation of structure. The fact that we are studying phenomena which belong to the past, deprives us, of course, of having direct access to their affective aspects, this most important source of our study. Hence we have reasons for being pessimistic in identifying and interpreting 'myth.' However, emotions are also moulded into sentiments, in different ways according to genre, 'prescribed emotions' constitute part of the meaning of tales in performance. What we may hope for, then, is to detect some of the vestiges of this moulding, and reconstruct the event in a holistic approach.

Yet another problem with identifying and interpreting 'myths' by readily observable properties is that it ignores the fact that tales may 'aim' at telling and doing something else than what they profess to do. They may in fact attract attention to some superficial elements while leading attention away from the essential meaning, a question to which I will return.

One of the crucial criteria of symbolic phenomena then is to be found in their *reception*. These phenomena cannot be studied without taking into consideration the effect upon the audience. What we would need is a direct access to the complete setting and a thorough knowledge of the particular culture, which would give us the means of distinguishing between the overt purposes of the performance and the hidden cultural meaning. This would in addition make us more sensitive to our own culturally conditioned perceptions and professional habits. Instead of describing some intrinsic 'meaning' of the tale (possibly our own response), we

25 Saliba 1976:100f. See below.

26 Cf. Geertz' (1976) concept of 'experience-near' as opposed to 'experience-distant' description in anthropological fieldwork, which he illustrates with the distinction between the concepts 'fear' and 'phobia' respectively.

should inquire into *the effects upon 'them,'* and instead of thinking in static imagery or purely intellectual categories, we should apply metaphors from human activity: symbolic *'workings.'*

Myths and 'myth'

In spite of these problems, however, I will still argue for the view that at an abstract level there does exist some common denominator to our object of study. When we have abolished the notion of some primitive man contrasting with our enlightened Western humanity, as well as abandoned the search for some commonly observable kind of tale, there still may be something we could call 'myth.' A general cause of much misunderstanding in the field of our study is the fact that we are familiar with the concept of 'Greek mythology,' *The Greek Myths* being a corpus of tales expressed in different kinds of literature and visual arts, the tales of particular individuals as Odysseus, Oidipous, Helene, Medeia and so forth. Understood in this sense, the definition of 'myth' is clear and simple, a group of identifiable *tales*, which by corollary we consider as historically and otherwise 'untrue.' But while we can readily determine whether a tale was part of the corpus of 'Greek myths' or not, we have great difficulty in answering the question, what kind of phenomena 'myths' are, and in giving one single definition. This is due, of course, to the fact that we start with catching all kinds of fish into our net, only to conclude that there does not exist any unified kind of Fish.

The problem is found in the synchronic and in the diachronic dimension. First there is the problem of overlapping. Certainly there does exist a wealth of studies about the different functions and properties of (Greek) myths, including the efforts by Geoffrey Kirk, Walter Burkert, and their followers, but there are also a number of studies noticing that 'mythical' properties ('l'imaginaire' or 'perceptual schemata') might be found in other, contemporary, tales as well, *e.g.* the historical writings of Herodotos, Ploutarkhos and others (*e.g.* Jean-Pierre Vernant, Pierre Vidal-Naquet and their followers, Claude Calame, and Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood). The suspicion that 'mythical' functions may be found in 'logic' discourse, that is, historiographical, philosophical and other scientific writings, creates confusion about the concept of 'myth.' The categories of 'Greek myths' and 'mythical' texts may thus partly overlap, partly constitute different fields.

The other source of confusion lies in the transmission of traditional tales to new environments, the fact that 'Greek myths' have been told in other contexts and ages than their original, where they do not serve the same function. This circumstance has prompted *e.g.* Jan Bremmer to peel off parts of the definition of myth proposed by Burkert.²⁷ In his view the tale does little more than provide the com-

²⁷ Bremmer 1987.

munity with a focus of identity.²⁸ When found outside the Greek cultural community, *e.g.* among the Romans, the mythical tale perhaps is neither old, traditional, nor meaningful. In short, what we so readily acknowledge as 'Greek myths' can cease to be 'mythical' in the sense of definitions proposed for this kind of tales. These dilemmas of inclusion and exclusion make it difficult to define 'myth,' and when we start from the surface of the traditional tales found in Greece or the Near East, the problem of definition becomes acute.

The problem we are witnessing may be reduced, of course, if we reserve the (everyday) term 'myths' to a particular kind of tale that is easily recognisable as such *e.g.* by their names and basic plots, 'Greek myth,' 'Near Eastern myth,' 'Nordic myth' and so fort. Such tales belong to a corpus commonly identifiable as originating within a particular group, and thus, geographical area and age. We have, then, to consider other types of tales, which some of the scholars mentioned have singled out as instances of 'l'imaginaire' or 'cultural concepts.'²⁹

We should, then, avoid the term 'myth' outside the body of tales we identify as a group's 'traditional tales.' When studying the *workings* of these and other tales, we may instead refer to 'symbolic phenomena' with its anthropological sense, and study their properties. This has two advantages: we may study the workings of a particular tale or class of tales in a particular place and time, and its incorporation into a certain rite, without suggesting that the tale as such always works in that way. In addition, we may recognise similar workings in tales other than those belonging to the body of 'traditional tales,' thereby getting a more precise insight into the processes at work and a closer view of what has been recognised as the difference between 'mythos' and 'logos.' What I have provisionally labelled 'myth(ical)' I prefer to call 'symbolic phenomenon.'

Recognising then that the well-known 'myths/traditional tales' are not co-extensive with 'symbolic phenomena' and that non-traditional tales are not always just rational accounts,³⁰ we may suggest a term 'symbolic tales' in order to collect those forms of verbal expression that seem to manifest 'symbolic workings.'³¹ A parallel distinction would be found in cultural imagery and other collective expressions.

We may assume also that this 'symbolic quality' is not inherent in the narrative itself, but an aspect of narrative in performance and activated in the audience at a particular moment, who creates and enjoys its workings. This implies that the

28 Bremmer 1987:5.

29 See the next section.

30 Of course the category of individual poetic creation is a third category, which does not interest us at the moment.

31 By selecting this term I would stress the active and creative aspects of symbolic phenomena.

symbolic quality may be vivid or fade away, be revived and extinguished, and so, briefly speaking, I would distinguish ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ myths, e.g. those (traditional) tales which are told in cultural performance and those that cease to be so. Their symbolic focus may move from one accent to another, creating new patterns and changing experiences. I envisage a rather manifold body of (traditional) tales, with complex ways of telling, shifting from rational ‘logos’ to symbolic workings and back again.

It may well be that the mythos-logos distinction does not yield a clear-cut division between kinds of tales (texts), but rather constitutes an abstraction separating strands within a text, which I would prefer to label ‘symbolic’ and ‘discursive’ respectively. Hence I would preliminarily propose that we assume that tales move along the poles of a continuous range of expressions, the ‘symbolic workings’ manifesting themselves in different ways and at different points and moments of the tale.

Our next task will of course be to identify and analyse these processes. I will presently return to the concept of ‘symbolic phenomena,’ and account for expressions as ‘performance,’ ‘workings,’ and ‘aim.’ For the moment I think it useful to recapitulate some of the theoretical reflection that has been devoted to the concept of ‘myth’ within our field of classical studies.

The definition of ‘myth’ within classical studies

As Kirk so eloquently has shown, ‘myths’ stage a wide range of dramatis personae, and can have been put into a number of services, so as to defy any definition of function,³² the result being that he vigorously rejects any unified definition of ‘myth,’ although he does not deny the existence of (kinds of) ‘myths.’ The only single definition he can accept is that ‘Myths are at the very least tales that have been passed down from generation to generation, that have become traditional.’³³

However, as we saw, tales staging ‘mythical’ personalities are not always of ancient date, some may demonstrably be new creations, the development of the Theseus myth being a clear example.³⁴ Since mythical tales may be modified in rather radical ways, ironically enough, even the minimal definition accepted by Kirk, ‘a traditional tale,’ may be inadequate as well. The only definition of ‘myth’ we are left with is ‘a tale,’ unless we save Kirk’s definition by noticing the permanence of traditional names of the heroes in an in some other respects new tale.

We should try, then, to approach the problem of definition by starting with the existence of ‘traditional tales,’ that is, tales which not necessarily are of ancient date

32 Kirk 1970:253f.; 1974:18.

33 Kirk 1970:282; 1974:27.

34 Bremmer 1987:3f.

or transmitted over the generations, but which are accepted by a group and surrounded with special care. Often they will refer to the remote past, which lends them authority.³⁵ Discussing the most influential definitions that have been proposed I will suggest some further precision leading to the question of the nature and substance of the phenomena involved. 'Myth' has been defined as:

- *traditional tale* (Kirk),³⁶ a narrative, which is *not necessarily very old* (Bremmer),³⁷ but at least *transmitted by a group* (Burkert),³⁸
- *independent of any particular text* (Burkert, Graf),³⁹
- carrying an aura of *truth* ('*Verbindtlichkeit*'),⁴⁰ by appearing in the guise of a record of the past, hence *e.g. anonymous, lacking an author, but rooted in time and space* (Graf),⁴¹
- *without immediate reference* (Burkert),⁴² not referring to empirical reality, *but shaping it*, either by offering
- *programs of action*, plot/motifemes (Burkert/Graf with reference to Propp)⁴³ founded on basic biological or social programs of action,
- *i.e. guiding ritual processes*⁴⁴ usually *exaggerating the patterns of ritual practice* (Bremmer, Versnel),⁴⁵ or
- *systems of classification* and systems of ordering social life (Vernant),⁴⁶ creating boundaries, defining 'the other' (Hartog *et al.*)⁴⁷
- sometimes by creating *inversion* (Vidal-Naquet, Burkert *et al.*)⁴⁸

35 Alternatives may be 'dream time' or the future.

36 Kirk 1970:282, 1974:27

37 Bremmer 1987:3.

38 Burkert 1979a:2. Burkert is followed by Nagy 1990:8.

39 Burkert 1979a:5 'the identity of a traditional tale, including myth, independent as it is from any particular text or language and from direct reference to reality.' Graf 1987:8 'Der Mythos ist nicht der aktuelle Dichtertext, sondern transzendiert ihn: er ist der Stoff, ein in großen Zügen festgelegter Handlungsablauf mit ebenso festen Personen, den der individuelle Dichter nur in Grenzen variieren kann,' *cf.* Graf 1996.

40 Graf 1987:9f.

41 Graf 1987:8f.

42 Burkert 1979a:3

43 Burkert 1979a:18, Burkert 1979b, Burkert 1981. *Cf.* Graf, 1987:56.

44 Burkert 1979b:29, Versnel 1993a, reviving Jane E. Harrison's term *pari passu*; *cf.* Burkert 1980:175.

45 Bremmer 1984, 1978; Versnel 1993b.

46 *E.g.* Vernant 1974.

47 Hartog 1980.

48 *E.g.* Vidal-Naquet 1983, 1986; Burkert 1970.

- *signs/perceptual schemata*, structuring, stylising and filtering the perception of reality (Calame, Sourvinou-Inwood),⁴⁹ creating and conveying means of apprehending reality,
- *collective metaphors, generated by a concatenation of categories* (Scheid and Svenbro),⁵⁰
- referring to *something of collective importance*, ‘*angewandte Erzählung*’ (Burkert),⁵¹ the collective property of a community or group, which recognises it as ‘our tale’ and to which it is meaningful, referring to a supra-individual reality, ‘le “savoir partagé”’ (Scheid and Svenbro),⁵² a living tale, *rooted in a particular historical environment* and formed by its audience to be culturally meaningful (Brelich),⁵³
- *offering a focus of identity* (Bremmer) and Dowden,⁵⁴
- *justifying institutions* such as family, clan, city or tribe (Burkert, Dowden and others),⁵⁵

49 Calame 1982; Sourvinou-Inwood 1988a ‘conceptual schemata;’ Sourvinou-Inwood 1991:4, ‘conceptual universe.’

50 Scheid and Svenbro 1994:9 ‘Si, dans le sous-titre, le mot “mythe” nous a semblé préférable à “métaphore,” c’est que la métaphore que nous étudions dans ce livre est une métaphore partagée - faisant partie de ce qu’on appelle couramment le “savoir partagé” et non pas une création individuelle.’ Cf. their difficulty in distinguishing myth from other symbolic phenomena, ‘C’est en effet en pensant à ces difficultés que nous avons été amenés à voir dans le mythe *non pas un récit*, mais une simple concaténation de catégories. Concaténation grace à laquelle il devient possible, à l’intérieur d’une culture donnée, d’engendrer des récits mythiques, des images et des rituels dans le champs qui sont leur propres. Envisagé ainsi, le rapport entre le récit, l’image et le rituel, désormais à égalité entre eux, ne serait donc pas celui d’un reflet spéculaire mais d’une parenté, donnant aux documents respectifs un air de famille, dont l’origine est cette concaténation de catégories que nous appelons mythe’(10). ‘Ce qui veut dire, en bref, que le mythe, dans une culture donnée, est une ‘proposition’ simple, génératrice de récits, d’images et de rituels’(11).

51 Burkert 1979a:23, 26 ff. Cf. Burkert 1979b:29. He is followed by Nagy 1990:8.

52 Scheid and Svenbro 1994:9.

53 Brelich 1977.

54 Bremmer 1987:5, Dowden 1992.

55 Burkert 1979a:29, “‘Wirklichkeiten,’ über die mythisch, d.h. in Form von Erzählung gesprochen wird, sind zunächst soziale Ordnungen, Institutionen und Ansprüche von Familie, Clan, Stadt und Stamm.’ Dowden 1992: 74-92 Ch. 5 ‘Myth and identity.’ Blake Tyrell and Brown 1991:6 propose the following definition of Greek myth ‘*a tale rooted in Greek culture that recounts a sequence of events chosen by the maker of the tale to accommodate his own medium and purpose and to achieve particular effects in his audience.* As narratives that both exemplify and shape [Greek] culture, myths are words in action’ (emphasis in the original). Konstan 1991 attempts to characterise the substance of Greek mythology concluding that it preferred homogenous anthropomorphism against hybridisation, rational events and individual characterisation. All these I think are questionable propositions. There are a number of hybrids, fantastical events, tale types and character stereotypes in Greek mythology.

— sometimes a *religious* expression, a tale drawing the sensibilities of a religious congregation towards its magnetic centre (many).

Sometimes 'traditional tales' seem to support social norms and values by explicit moralising, Calame's 'argumentative and rational functions.' Presently I would consider them as 'Greek myths' employed in a didactic way, that is, being part of a deliberate rhetorical strategy. With this distinction I foreshadow the following discussion, in which I will emphasise the non-verbalised(-able?) aspects of 'symbolic phenomena.' Another function of traditional tales may be their strategic use in order to establish legitimacy (*e.g.* Herodotos *Hist.* 9:27).⁵⁶ A particular kind may be the creation of heroes with their 'biography' and the establishment of a grave cult as a pervasive culture-creating tendency, which can be found throughout history up to our age and culture, according to Pierre Vidal-Naquet.⁵⁷

The properties of 'myth' thus far presented have found wide acceptance among classical scholars. However, they may be considered within a general view and observations from religious studies and modern field anthropology.

Concepts and theories from modern anthropology

In other fields than classical studies the definition of myth has been difficult to arrive at too.⁵⁸ To Eliade myth has been a 'paradigmatic model of what happened in the original past ... a primordial event,' legitimising the present, and characterised by a basic pattern, a pattern in which opposite and contrary realities and statements are united harmoniously ... a *coincidentia oppositorum*.⁵⁹ However, the concept of 'myth' is most often given a far broader content and different attributes within anthropology. It is noticed that tales, which are identified as 'myth,' can present a wide range of themes, and can be owned by different social groups. These tales cannot be taken at their face value. The functions of 'myth' may be variously assessed, from unifying device, explanation of natural phenomena, justification of authority, power and status to inversion and expressions of conflict. 'Myth, however, is never a complete replica or reflection of a people's culture and it may contain exaggerated and inverted features of real life ... And not all myths represent a harmonious unity of social life; some, on the contrary, can be ... expressing and not solving social-psychological conflicts of a particular social structure or of certain distributions of power within society.'⁶⁰ Mythological accounts are not always

56 Connor 1970. The creative and spontaneous use of collective patterns in political action has been studied for several periods. Examples are Connor 1987, Strauss 1985.

57 See the interesting study on the phenomenon, 'Des dieux, des rois, des héros et des saints,' Vidal-Naquet 1993.

58 Cf. Saliba 1976:72ff. for this brief overview of the situation.

59 Saliba 1976:4f. Eliade is followed by Hübner 1985.

taken seriously by their audience and the degree of belief may vary. Not all societies seem to have a mythology, nor do myths necessarily refer to the past. Myths may point to the future as do millenarian tales. And the tales may present 'a lawless, asexual or promiscuous condition,' that is, the scandalous world as observed by Detienne's mythographers.⁶¹

Within these studies the concept of 'symbolic phenomena'⁶² or 'symbolism' has a firm tradition,⁶³ where it often refers to ritual. It seems, however, that much of what is said about symbolic behaviour, rites and so forth, includes traditional tales as well.⁶⁴ The distinction between rites and myths (and icons) is not an essential one, but sometimes useful for practical purposes, helpful only as seen from the observer's perspective. In terms of their origin and function they are inseparable: traditional tales, ritual behaviour, traditional images and physical arrangements.⁶⁵

The fact that the expression 'traditional' has been widely accepted may be due to a tendency of tales to be presented as 'our tradition.' However, as we have seen, this does not necessarily require factual age, and it may be helpful, with Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff to acknowledge this feature of 'being handed down' as a technique of creating 'the truth.' Studying what they call 'secular rituals,' they observe that these ceremonies (including mythical drama and so forth) have a tendency to become '*traditionalizing*,'⁶⁶ that is, these expressions are embedded in practices that confer authority on the tale. In the case of ritual, the essential fact is not that the practices have virtually been repeated for generations. The ritual process itself does not need to be age-old, but its stylised form rather suggests tradition by being 'attention-commanding.'⁶⁷ Historians studying recent historical develop-

60 Saliba 1976:73f. According to Saliba the anthropological approach embraces '(1) explanation in terms of antecedent event or efficient causes; (2) explanation in terms of mediating factors [... meaning of customs and values in terms of their interrelatedness]; (3) explanation in terms of ends or purposes [... functional studies]; and (4) explanation in terms of general laws or principles [... sees its object within a larger framework, as pertaining to a class]' (101).

61 Saliba 1976:126 ff.

62 With this expression I refer to certain kinds of cultural phenomena that have been subject to renewed interest during the last thirty years. Spiro 1969:208 'symbolic anthropology ... the ostensibly new field of symbols and symbolism.'

63 Spiro 1969, Firth 1973. The term 'symbol' has been in use in other research fields as well of course, e.g. psychology, Freud 1921, philosophy, Cassirer 1973, linguistics, Sapir 1972-79.

64 Turner 1969b:8 'the basic unit or "molecule" of human ritual behavior—which contains both verbal and non-verbal constituents ... is the ritual symbol.'

65 Cf. the definition of 'myth' proposed by Scheid and Svenbro 1994.

66 Moore and Myerhoff 1977:7 '... collective ceremony can traditionalize new material as well as perpetuate old traditions. Some of its formal properties mimic its message in this regard.'

67 Moore and Myerhoff 1977:8 'In acting, stylization and presentational staging, ritual is attention-commanding.'

ments also realise that invention plays a role in 'mass-producing traditions.' As Hobsbawm concludes, 'traditions' which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented.⁶⁸ The essence of 'tradition,' then, is not necessarily age, but the circumstance that the tale (rite, image) is institutionalised, and surrounded by collective care, creating a magnetic centre upon which people spontaneously lavish their emotional and material resources.⁶⁹ Traditions belong to the general category of cultural symbols, they share their properties of being emotionally charged and comprising multiple meanings, which make them particularly flexible instruments of creating culture.⁷⁰ In fact it is especially in times when society is being rapidly transformed that the need is felt for 'invented tradition of a novel type for quite novel purposes.'⁷¹ We have to return to these properties in more detail.

Not only do symbolic tales tend to be enveloped in a 'traditionalising' atmosphere, they are, by definition held in a *concrete form*.⁷² A symbolic tale stages a presentation of concrete personae rather than uttering abstract propositions. This obvious property of symbolical tales is often passed over in analyses of the phenomenon. We have been so familiar with the explanation that the staging of individual fates is due to the 'primitive' nature of myth, that we have overlooked the possibility that it may be an essential requirement of the phenomenon. It seems necessary to examine this concrete or '*presentational*' nature of symbolic tales, as it is labelled by Moore and Myerhoff,⁷³ which is opposed to explicit arguing. The purpose of the 'presentational' quality is to deflect questioning.⁷⁴ We can expect that symbolic tales may appear as tales from the past, generally being enveloped in an aura of *factuality*, presenting facts of history, but also geography, or general 'nature.'

Another aspect of symbolic tales is that they may include an 'exegesis,' explanations of the events presented. These exegesises, however, need not offer the real rea-

68 Hobsbawm 1992:9 Their functions include establishing or symbolising cohesion, establishing or legitimising institutions, socialisation.

69 Hobsbawm 1992 stresses the circumstance that traditional histories are in fact not the events actually recorded, but those which 'have been selected, pictured, popularised and institutionalised by those in function to do so' (13). Giving some examples of the invention of traditions in our modern world he notices '... all invented traditions, so far as possible, use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion' (12).

70 Hobsbawm 1992:11 'The crucial element seems to have been the invention of emotionally and symbolically charged signs of club membership ... Their significance lay precisely in their undefined universality.'

71 Hobsbawm 1992:6.

72 Cf. Lévi-Strauss 1977:61 'logic of the concrete.'

73 Moore and Myerhoff 1977:7.

74 Moore and Myerhoff 1977:8 'ritual ... deflects questioning at the time.' Cf. Connerton 1989:102.

sons. We have to realise that the *explanation* ('*motivation*') of a symbolic tale *may be part of the tale*, while the real motives remain hidden. According to Sperber, 'The symbolic character of a motivation is not due to the fact that it applies to a symbol, it is rather the object that becomes symbolic by virtue of the motivation that is applied to it ... motivations establish the truth of a statement not by demonstrating it but by presupposing it.'⁷⁵ The meaning offered, as an exegesis, is in fact not the real one. This suggestion is related to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of '*méconnaissance/misrecognition*,' the fact that the real meaning of symbolic expression is disguised.⁷⁶ In other words, symbolic expression often serves another *aim* than that which it professes to do. The facts of nature or history, even when being the subject of the tale, are not really what is at stake, perhaps not even when they are presented in cosmogonic tales.

Maybe the pervasive criticism and 'correction' of mythical tales in antiquity (e.g. the introduction to the first Homeric hymn to Dionysos or Pindaros' First *Olympian Ode*, Eur. *IA* 794) was a necessary part of the system serving a similar purpose. And while disputing which was the correct version of a story, the critic presupposed the existence of the mythical hero. According to Paul Veyne 'Le mythe était un sujet de réflexions graves et les Grecs n'en avaient pas encore fini avec lui, six siècles après ce mouvement des Sophistes qu'on dit avoir été leur *Aufklärung*. Loin d'être un triomphe de la raison, l'épuration du mythe par le *logos* est un programme très daté, dont l'absurdité surprend ...' (Veyne 1983:13).

Thus far we could summarise the properties of 'symbolic tales' into an abbreviated definition as 'culture-creating tales.' The epithet is of course too general to be very useful, and has to be refined with detailed qualifications. However, with this expression we may avoid the passive connotations of 'traditional' as 'the present generation ruled by the past' as well as 'the present receiving information from the past.' On the contrary, as we have seen, symbolic tales are both highly flexible *tools*, grasped and selectively moulded for strategically shaping concep-

75 Sperber 1975:30f. Cf. '... the motivation of symbols (of which exegesis is a special case) is not metasymbolic, but symbolic (33).' 'Exegesis ... does not constitute interpretation of the symbol, but one of its extensions, and must itself be symbolically interpreted' (48). Cf. Scheid and Svenbro 1994:11, '... le mythe, dans une culture donnée, est une 'proposition' simple ... Et d'exégèses, faut-il ajouter.'. Buxton's discussion of the explanations of traditional tales overlooks the problem of pseudo-explanations, the fact that the explanation given does not present the real issue at stake, it only apparently offers some reason (1994:211). Lloyd 1983:217, studying the development of Greek science, argues that science made explicit, what were implicit concerns in traditional thought.

76 Bourdieu 1982:122 '... tout rite tend à consacrer ou à légitimer, c'est à dire à faire méconnaître en tant qu'arbitraire et reconnaître en tant que légitime, naturelle, une limite arbitraire.' Cf. Bourdieu 1992:81.

tions of the present, as well as *dynamic forces* structuring the cultural senses of individuals and audiences.

This latter property I would bring into focus, because I think we are not always aware of the complex workings of our material in its original setting. As I suggested the scepticism about the existence of a category of 'myth' may in part be due to the fact that these tales frequently are described within an entirely intellectual approach. Often symbolic tales are analysed as if they were tales merely *conveying* action patterns or 'classification systems,' this underlying structure being basically a non-affective or non-narrative entity. Proponents of this view seem to assume that symbolic tales are expressions of some language competence, and just another cognitive medium.⁷⁷ Hence the surface tale is dispensed with as less interesting, and with it the rich moulding of the affective reactions in the audience.

I would not deny that symbolic tales do shape the cognitive world of the audience, but we have to be aware of the possibility that these tales do more than just order perception. For this reason the surface of the symbolic tale is not irrelevant to its meaning. It is basically through the details of the telling that different reactions to the tale are roused, and with them collective sentiments of value are created. At this stage already I would suggest that some of the essential workings of 'symbolic tales' are to be found in the interaction between classificatory ordering of perception and the charging with value. The question of the existence of 'myth' seems thus to be more a question of terminology and focus: by labelling a tale as an instance of the 'classification system,' the structure within the tale is equated with the mythical tale as such, and hence it does not differ essentially from ordinary speech. By directing the main focus upon deciphering this structure in the tale, the tale's total presentation of events is given less attention. But it is through the totality of the tale that 'meaning' comes about and cultural elements are charged with value. In particular the tale's performance in a concrete social setting should, when possible, be given proper attention, the details of the telling and reception.

The semiotic approach includes both structural and narrative aspects, and may be more useful as a common denominator for the cultural element of symbolic tales.⁷⁸ Still both structuralist and semiotic approaches may be too intellectual, in that they present their object of study as underlying structures or patterns of thought, without accounting extensively for the affective impact of symbolic tales.

77 Cf. Connerton 1989:104. What is lacking, according to Connerton is the notion of 'the body as a bearer of social meaning' and incorporating practises serving a social mnemonic purpose. Connerton focussing on the importance of 'habit-memory' of bodily processes in the creation of a group's collective sense and action. The notion of 'habitus' in Bourdieu 1977 is fundamental here.

78 Sourvinou-Inwood 1991.

The approach of Walter Burkert and Fritz Graf is primarily directed towards the plot aspect of traditional tales, these being by definition narrative. However, they consider ‘myths’ not to be identical with the surface tale either, but to be found embedded as plot structure of an elementary schematic nature, ‘*Aktionsprogramme*,’ e.g. a ‘girl’s tragedy,’⁷⁹ the ‘transgression, punishment’⁸⁰ scheme, or the New Year’s ‘dissolution and reunion’ plot. In practical analyses, however, they pay attention to the affective impact of particular episodes.⁸¹ What is important is that this approach in its definition seriously focuses on the social context of the ‘applied’ tale.

Still I doubt whether this approach sufficiently accounts for the elaborated form of traditional tales, their composition as a bounded tale, their often fantastic or ‘scandalous’ content, which appeals to the imagination and the senses, and structures cultural sentiments.

This point can be illustrated by the following example. If the essence of ‘myth’ is to be found exclusively in its plot-structure or motifs, how are we then to account for tales which offer similar plot schemes, while on the surface being obviously different? Comparing Euripides’ *Bakkhai* and Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* Daniel Levine observes ‘the common plot involves groups of women in rebellion against the civil authorities ... retreat to a holy mountain ... [they] defeat their primary male antagonist, who himself is dressed as a woman ... and dies a ritual death.’⁸² Levine assumes then that these two dramas ‘with their common themes and “women on top” associations, demonstrate an affinity between the genres ...’⁸³ This view precisely misrepresents the distinction between genres and disregards the surface text, which creates completely different meanings. In both dramas women ensnare their male enemy, the first presenting the tragic fate of Pentheus, the second the comic degradation of the Athenian magistrate. Although one of these dramas obviously did not treat traditional material, both were performed at the public and religious celebration of the Dionysia in classical Athens. The theory of an underlying plot structure cannot account for the differences between these two tales, because it does not take into account the ‘prescribed’ affective reactions in the theatre. The object of these dramas was to rouse vastly

79 Burkert 1979a:7.

80 Graf 1987:54.

81 Burkert 1966; Graf 1979; Bremmer 1984; Versnel 1993b and 1993c.

82 Levine 1987. The tale of the Lemnian women, which in Burkert’s interpretation accompanied the new year festival at Lemnos, we may assume, was performed in a serious and solemn version at this festival. However, we may imagine a version like Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*, (similarly an action of women run wild and getting power over their men) but contrary to the Lemnian version evoking outrageous laughter.

83 Levine 1987:30. He even asks ‘Why does no playwright cross the genre boundary?’ (36).

different responses in the audience, horror and laughter respectively, the tragic and comic emotions intended within the two distinct performances.

In the case of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* we can readily assume a 'mundus inversus' scheme, the hilarious situation of a world ruled by women. While this plot could have been a seriously subversive utterance of rebellious women, the not so subtle parody of female weaknesses in the surface text excludes this option, while the opposite, a ridiculous 'women-on-top' scenario supporting the *status-quo* is much more plausible. When we take the context of theatrical and social organisation into account, all doubt should disappear. A simple analysis of plot-structure which does not include the social context, nor the fantastic elaboration of the surface texts is bound to fail in discovering the tale's cultural meaning. The same applies to the *Bakkhai*, with its subtle orchestration of the audience's imagination and cultural emotions surrounding the central value of Dionysiac cult. Instead of ridiculing the 'women on top' scenario, the drama's workings result in sacralising this (cultic) world order, that is, *the taboo on male participation*, in the service of the all-powerful god.⁸⁴ These compositional, imaginal and affective aspects we have to include into our analysis of 'symbolic tales.'

Culture and its workings

There are however still other aspects to the problem, the question whether and how we may separate 'symbolic tales' from general 'cultural processes.' This problem guides us to the question how cultural patterns and values are created and maintained. These are of course conveyed in every day communication, through the examples given by others and in the expectations they communicate. But in addition to this 'routine' maintenance of the culturally ordered world most groups are in need of extraordinary means of mobilising common focusing, the festive, non-mundane instruments of culture, not seldom resulting in the creation of anti-order.

This double nature of what is commonly classified as 'symbols' has been analysed by Sherry Ortner. She distinguishes between two kinds of 'key-symbols, summarizing and elaborating' in the following manner: 'Summarizing symbols are primarily objects of attention and cultural respect; they synthesize or "collapse" complex experience, and relate the respondent to the grounds of the system as a whole. They include most importantly sacred symbols in the traditional sense.

84 For a detailed analysis see Bouvrie 1997. A shorter version, with iconography Bouvrie 1998. Konstan 1991 argues for the distinctively Greek nature of Greek myths, maintaining that *Greek* myths cannot be separated from their poetic medium, e.g. tragedy which focuses on emotional and personal content. I am sceptical of this modern conception of tragedy as well as of the notion that the myths of other cultures can be understood without listening to the details of the telling.

Elaborating symbols, on the other hand, are symbols valued for their contribution to the ordering or “sorting out” of experience. Within this are symbols valued primarily for the ordering of conceptual experience, *i.e.* for providing cultural “orientations,” and those valued primarily for the ordering of action, *i.e.* for providing cultural “strategies”: ... ‘Summarizing symbols in general ... operate to compound and synthesize a complex system of ideas, to “symmarize” them under a unitary form ... Elaborating symbols, on the other hand, work in the opposite direction, providing vehicles for sorting out complex and undifferentiated feelings and ideas ... they are essentially analytic. Rarely are theses symbols sacred’⁸⁵ Key symbols are signaled by several ‘indicators:

(1) The natives tell us that x is culturally important,

(2) the natives may seem positively or negatively aroused about x, rather than indifferent,

(3) x comes up in many different contexts. These contexts may be behavioral or systemic: x comes up in many different kinds of action situation or conversation or x comes up in many different symbolic domains (myth, ritual, art, formal rhetoric, etc.),

(4) there is greater cultural elaboration surrounding x, *e.g.* elaboration of vocabulary, or elaboration of details of x’s nature, compared with similar phenomena in the culture, and

(5) there are greater cultural restrictions surrounding x, either in sheer number of rules, or severity of sanctions regarding its misuses.⁸⁶

Both the summarising symbols, which synthesise complex experience and elaborating symbols which are analytic involve feelings, the first by mobilising commitment around complex ideas, the other by sorting feelings and ideas. Symbols, and culture in general are seen as creating ‘orientations,’ *i.e. cognitive* and *affective* categories; and ‘strategies,’ *i.e.* programs for orderly social action in relations to culturally defined goals’ (emphasis added).⁸⁷

Outside the routine maintenance of social norms, and in addition to every speech act, which may enforce the rules of society, there are the special occasions of ‘symbolic speech,’ that is, tales that are surrounded with special attention and which may be designed in order to evoke some culturally prescribed sentiments in

85 Ortner 1973:1340. Key symbols are public and not necessarily conscious, they point to special cultural interests. Key symbols of the summarizing kind are those that demand special commitment, while elaborating symbols serve to direct thought and action with their formal organizational role.

86 Ortner 1973:1339 ‘... there may be more indicators even than these of the key status of a symbol in a culture, but any of these should be enough to point even the most insensitive fieldworker in the right direction.’

87 Ortner 1973:1340.

the minds of the listeners. These tales belong to the wider category of 'public events,' in Don Handelman's terms, celebrations which are set apart, 'framed,' from every-day life and acknowledged as such by the community.⁸⁸ This author focuses on the way these special events are created and the manner in which they are structured. 'Public events' (or ritualized action) are of central importance to a group, and different types of social organisation tend to create certain types of rituals, '... different logics of design in the constitution of public events index social orders that themselves are organized in radically different ways.'⁸⁹ Each of the phenomena identified by Handelman as 'public events' follows a special sequence or script with 'formalization of space, time, and behaviour that distinguishes these [public occasions] from the living of mundane life.'⁹⁰

Victor Turner has contributed to the study of symbolism by pointing to the evocative character of symbols. He recognises as a general feature of symbolic phenomena that they mobilise the senses, imagination and emotions of the participants. In many rituals this is achieved by a wide-spread use of music, song, dancing, visual attributes, special costumes and masques, and the use of alcohol, incense or other stimulants. During the celebrations he has studied, there is a similarly wide-spread tendency to present 'sacra,' that is, dramas or tales which refer to some basic human experiences, such as the relations between family members, sex, birth and death. During the event the senses and emotions of the participants are aroused to a higher level of sensitivity, while at the same time messages about the basic norms of society are transmitted. The complex stimulation affects the audience's emotional or 'orectic' sensibility, while the implicitly transmitted messages direct themselves at the 'normative' receptivity of the participants. Turner's main point here is that the 'exotic' aspects of symbolic phenomena are in fact a fundamentally necessary requirement for creating culture, 'Ritual, scholars are coming to see, is precisely a mechanism that periodically converts the obligatory into the desirable.'⁹¹ According to Victor and Edith Turner the 'sacra' enacted in a religious celebration not unexpectedly often present the cultural heroes *transgressing* conventional morality, thereby no doubt eliciting reactions of abhorrence in the audience to the ('scandalous'!) tale. In a ludic phase, on the other hand, there

88 Handelman 1990.

89 Handelman 1990:7.

90 Handelman 1990:11. Celebrations which mirror the ideal world are found in powerful bureaucratic states, those that shape and model the participants are more common among tribal people, and those that re-present, that is 'work on comparison and contrast in relation to social realities,' belong to traditional hierarchic societies. Here we typically find liminal phenomena, as indeterminacy and inversion, the temporally acceptance of anti-structure. Handelman, 1990:66, cf. *idem* 1982.

91 Turner 1967:especially 27-47, 29f.; Cf. Turner 1969a, 1969b, 1974, 1992.

are activities, which turn the world upside-down and play with the elements of culture, producing a '*jocund festivity*' in order to revitalise the community, or—in times of crisis—to heal a social breach.⁹² There is thus no question that cultural symbols merely mirror the hierarchies and ideal order of the world. Instead, in celebrations, this world is broken up and transformed in order to achieve definite affective reactions in the participants. As Barbara Babcock argues, societies need both order and disorder (1978b). I will presently return to this aspect.

We are familiar with the fact that in initiation ceremonies the accompanying tale commonly tells of the horrible fate of some young (male) heroes and their wanderings outside the civilised world (Bremmer, Calame, Sourvinou-Inwood),⁹³ or, as Bruce Lincoln suggests interpreting female transition rites (the Persephone myth in the *Homeric hymn to Demeter* included), the tale evokes the cosmic significance of the (female) hero/initiand.⁹⁴ Through the evocative force of the tale the participants in the rite were transformed in their experience of themselves. And as Lincoln underscores, the essential workings of the ritual telling is the transformation of the people involved.⁹⁵

Lincoln has studied the creative and mobilising aspects of symbolic tales, a category which he terms 'discourse,' together with phenomena as ritual and classification. Countering the wide-spread idea that myths are conservative vehicles of traditional values, or oppressive to the powerless, he states that there is nothing intrinsically reactionary in myth (Lincoln 1983:81). He demonstrates through several studies that 'discourse can also serve members of subordinate classes to demystify, delegitimate, and deconstruct the established norms, institutions and discourses that play a role in constructing their subordination.'⁹⁶ Still Lincoln observes a general tendency to create myths referring to the remote past as reactionary instruments of power, while myths viewing the future as a construction of an ideal world, as is observed in millenary movements. He presents the schematic equation (1983:84):

$$\textit{'Cosmogonia:Escatologia} = \textit{Reazione:Rivoluzione.}'$$

92 Turner and Turner 1982; Cf. Turner 1982 and Turner 1999:577. For an interesting application of Turner's models within a classical context see Strauss 1985.

93 Bremmer 1978:2, Calame 1983; 1990, Sourvinou-Inwood 1979.

94 Lincoln 1981.

95 Lincoln, 1981:34 '... using symbolic action, transforming the individuals involved, endowing mundane existence with some grander meaning, and reaffirming the abstract values of society at large.' Cf. 'I view ritual as a coherent set of symbolic actions that has a real, transformative, effect on the individuals and social groups' (6).

96 Lincoln 1989:5. Cf. Lincoln 1985.

Above all stressing the imperative and dynamic force of the phenomenon Lincoln warns against conceiving of myths as just 'reflections' of or 'comments' upon society (1983:79).

Within cultural performance studies stressing the importance of the socially created context, it is generally assumed that the social interaction between performers and audiences has the capacity to transform, not simply reflect social life. Felicia Hughes-Freeland studying modern performative genres focuses on 'the active roles which militate against the notion of the audience as passive recipients of a clear communication.' In the terms of Edward Schieffelin 'performance deals with actions more than text: with habits of the body more than with the structures of symbols, with illocutory rather than propositional force, with the social construction of reality rather than its representation,'⁹⁷

Studies of the 'performance' of symbolic expression suggests that this modelling of emotions is an important part of the events. The (unconsciously) orchestrated sentiments in cultural performances are studied in macro-celebrations as the present-day Olympic games by John MacAloon.⁹⁸ These special occasions clearly demonstrate that the modulation of sentiments is an important aspect of these collective events.⁹⁹

Handelman is especially interested in the way these public performances are structured, that is, the 'orchestration of experience and affect, the moods, states, emotions and sentiments of participants and on-lookers.'¹⁰⁰ This aspect of public events has also been given special attention by Bruce Kapferer, who points to the fact that there may be sequences of expected sentiments which are evoked in rituals where the powers of the universe are dramatised, and the techniques by which the audiences are guided through a programme of reactions, may vary from serious to hilarious. We have thus reason to be attentive to this modulation of cultural sentiments. The dynamic character of certain ritual phenomena is brought out in a number of studies, e.g. the transformation of the participants through special 'symbolic types,' in particular the ritual clown. According to Kapferer '... the analysis of ritual as form, particularly in relation to how it effects important transformations of the contexts of meaning and action cannot be satisfactorily achieved without considering the process of its performance. ... [Ritual] is not simply the presentation of symbolic objects and actions in highly stereotyped and redundant

97 Hughes-Freeland 1998:15, Schieffelin 1998:194. Cf. Bauman and Briggs 1990:59-69.

98 MacAloon 1984. He analyses the different moods dominating the various genres of rite, game, festival, and spectacle: solemnity, joy, fun, awe, and so forth.

99 Cf. Fernandez 1974:123 '... society is not only a system of interlocking categories, but an ebb and flow of emotion.'

100 Handelman 1990:1f.

form, the dramatic revelation of myth, the expression of cultural ideas and principles, the marking out of some inexorable cultural logic and so on. Ritual moves participants, it organises their emotions and experience, it questions those taken-for-granted elements of cultural life and holds them up for inspection. We have often been reduced to the consideration of ritual as conforming to a set of semantic rules, or as being organised in accordance with linguistic principles. This may be so, but ritual derives its efficacy and power from its performance and it is in its performance that its work of transformation fails or succeeds.¹⁰¹

The capacity of symbols to mobilise people into collective action is due to their complex affective-cognitive nature. Lincoln in fact supports the general view that 'society is constructed from nothing so much as from sentiments.'¹⁰² Symbolic phenomena, then, do not only involve the conceptual ordering of the participants' world, their cognitive function, a primary aim is to mould the emotional reactions of single participants. Abner Cohen even maintains that symbolic action is essential to the preservation of the self. 'The contractual element is subversive of selfhood, the symbolic element is recreative of selfhood. It is in the symbolic act that we continually create and recreate our selfhood, the totality of our person' (123 emphasis in the original).¹⁰³ Following Turner he argues that 'the norms, values, principles and rules [of society] are abstract and remote and their mere perception by the person is not sufficient to induce him to action. It is only when a person is emotionally agitated by the sensory pole of the symbol that he will be moved by action' (121). Clifford Geertz reminds us of the fact that 'not only ideas, but emotions too, are cultural artefacts.'¹⁰⁴

Inversion

The cultural device that is especially responsible for moulding the participants' sentiments in symbolic processes is the *inversion* of the normal order.¹⁰⁵ We are so familiar with this phenomenon that we might lose out of sight that the most important aspect is its emotional quality.

101 Kapferer 1984b:6. Cf. Kapferer 1984a, Handelman and Kapferer 1980.

102 Lincoln 1989:20. Turner 1969b:12 analysing the operational dimension of symbols, what participants do with them, includes their 'affective quality ..., whether they are "aggressive," "sad," "joyful," "penitent," "derisive," and so forth, in terms of the given culture's standardized interpretations of these expressive acts.'

103 Cohen 1977, cf. Pinxten 1991.

104 Geertz 1973:81.

105 Babcock 1978b. Objectively and from an intellectual point of view this phenomenon is often labelled *incongruence*.

Inversions are part of the festive and ritual practices as opposed to normal behaviour. According to Barbara Babcock, the tendency to dissolve the normal systems of signification and to create a state of disorder answers a fundamental human urge and belongs to the realm of 'ritual' as contrasted with 'normal and ceremonial discourse.'¹⁰⁶ She observes that in normal (and ceremonial) communication there is complementarity between signifier and signified. 'In contrast, ritual communication involves both an extremely economical and extremely inflated relation of signifiers to signifieds.' During these practices man may create phenomena with disproportionate relationships between signifier and of signified, resulting in a surplus of signifiers or a multitude of signifieds. In the first case, veritable 'fireworks' are created, 'as pure pattern and pure possibility, ... a symbol of revolution, it is itself a revolution in, a suspension of serious and normal modes of signification' (*loc. cit.*).¹⁰⁷ In contrast to these carnivalesque results, the second alternative creates 'the multi-signified of serious ritual communication' (*loc. cit.*).

As Babcock observes 'Ritual events as well as distinct phases or sequences within a given event are initially marked or framed by a bracketing of ordinary signification. In one of two ways—by literally denying and stripping away or by multiplying to the point of indeterminate nonsense—we suspend customary meanings: by fasting or feasting, by sexual abstinence or sexual licence, by nakedness or by costumes of motley, by immobility or excessive movement, by seclusion or public display, by silence or noise.' (1978b:297).

'While bracketing through excess is more frequently the means of framing ludic or antistructural rituals or ritual phases, and denial more generally indicative of the serious and the structural, such is not always the case: priests wear costumes as well as clowns. Whatever the initial frame, ritual sequences that are essentially serious and iterative of structure are ordering and orderly. This means that the ma-

106 'A surplus of signifiers, then, creates a self-transgressive discourse which mocks and subverts the monological arrogance of "official" systems of signification. The bantering *anti*-signified of carnivalesque discourse is an insult both to the complementarity of ordinary speech and to the multi-signified of serious ritual communication. It is also a statement in praise of and as a demonstration of the creative potential of human signification as opposed to its instrumental and representative use' (Babcock 1978b:296)

107 'By playing with the ways in which words and objects and actions signify in normal and ceremonial discourse, discourse by means of a surplus of signifiers paradoxically both questions and reaffirms social, cultural, and cosmological orders of things. While a superfluity of signifiers is predominant and self-evident in ludic or carnivalesque ritual, I would suggest that *all* rituals involve a dialogue or alternation between these two modes of signification—multi-signifier and multi-signified—both of which differ from our daily, ordinary use of signs. In contrast to the complementarity between signifier and signified characteristic of normal discourse, ritual communication involves *both* an extremely economical *and* extremely inflated relation of signifiers to signifieds' (*loc. cit.*).

jority of signs—verbal and nonverbal—are polysemic or multisignified and that they are hierarchically arranged, the dominant or central symbols marked by extreme multivocality (297) .

In contrast, those rituals or phases of ritual which focus on the ambiguous and inhibited aspects of the social order, or which invert, contradict, or otherwise challenge structure, are disorderly and disordering. Antistructural sequences are likely to be ungrammatical and indeterminate, and this indeterminacy is expressed primarily, though not exclusively, through an excess of “floating signifiers” (297). In ritual, society “takes cognizance of itself” and communicates its major classifications and categories both through ordering them and through disordering them—by overdetermining *and* by rendering indeterminate customary processes of significations. Ritual, then, involves not only the enactment and transmission of the ultimate sacred propositions, but also the exposure of the ultimately significant to the devastating play of *nonsense*. This paradox inherent in ritual is significant.’ (298).

What I think particularly interesting is the fact that inversion can be created with different means and varying effects. The comic topsy-turvy world of fantasy is a well known device of rousing laughter, it is at the core of carnival and has burst forth spontaneously in many times and places. I would call attention to the way inversion may operate along a tragic as well as a comic axis.

It may be less generally accepted that the world of disaster may generate inversions of a gloomy kind. In fact tales of the terrible chaos, which once upon a time disrupted the order of the world, bringing barbarian invasions, revolution of the lower classes, parricide and sterility, are not uncommon in oriental texts, as has been demonstrated by S. Luria, who labels them tales of ‘die trübe Zeit.’ However, often these tales are contrasted by visions of a paradise-like condition, when the poor rise to power and the earth provides peace and abundance, ‘eine selige Glückzeit.’¹⁰⁸ Tales of the age of Kronos or Saturnus, as Hendrik Versnel has argued, confront a time of chaos and disaster with a paradise-like age of peace and happiness.¹⁰⁹ No doubt such tales belong to this category of gloom *vs.* peace-and-abundance tales. Even if the tale offers an outrageous violation of norms, it may be beneficent to the audience and result in the creation of culture.¹¹⁰

108 Luria 1929. Cf. Auffarth 1991.

109 Versnel 1993b and 1993c respectively.

110 This effect could be compared with the emotions noticed by Nancy Munn in her detailed analysis of the emotional effects of symbolic expression upon the participants in initiation rite and myth (Munn 1969:199). ‘Thus the body destruction experiences connected with the individual and pre-social forms of power are converted into experiences of bodily well-being and strength through the operation of the ritual upon the myth.’

In a somewhat different way Greek tragedy seems to offer this kind of tale, staging a primordial time when the world was newly ordered. In the course of the mythical events this fundamental order is disrupted, to the ‘shock and horror’ of the audience. The Attic theatrical performances with their impressive lyrical and imaginative poetry evoked the metaphysical world of living gods and heroes and worked upon the cultural reflexes of the participants. This precludes any notion of a quasi-philosophic drama, as is so often assumed, when terms as ‘discourse,’ ‘didactic function’ and so forth are applied.¹¹¹

The foundation of these notions of tragic drama may be a result of projection on the part of the investigator, who ‘observes’ his own intellectual processes in the object. Jean-Pierre Vernant argues that the tragic protagonists were perceived by the audience as persons stemming from a distant age, while the chorus voiced the attitudes of contemporary Athens.¹¹² Vernant’s basic notion of Attic tragedy assumes a ‘dual relationship with myth. In the tragic conflict, the hero, the king, and the tyrant certainly still appear committed to the heroic and mythical tradition, but the solution to the drama escapes them. It is never provided by the hero on his own; it always expresses the triumph of the collective values imposed by the new democratic city-state.’¹¹³ N.T. Croally argues for tragedy’s ‘didactic function.’ Following Vernant the author maintains ‘In the democracy, the widening of the franchise was more extreme, the right to speak openly more acceptable, and the politicization of discourse more complete. Tragedy was such a discourse.’¹¹⁴ This last sentence is no more than an *a priori* statement. Similarly Christian Meier assumes a political forum of debate, offering rhetorical questions rather than arguments: ‘Fragen über Fragen mußten sich auf tun, die man kaum vor der Volksversammlung erörtern konnte ... Konnte da die Tragödie einspringen? ... Brauchten sie [die Griechen] die Tragödie vielleicht auch, um Distanz zum Alltag zu gewinnen, Ausgleich, Klarheit—und ein Offenhalten der Grundlagen ihres Lebens: brauchten sie sie zu deren Weiterbildung?’¹¹⁵

In this question of interpretation we as scholars, belonging to a generation which saw the fundamental challenging of academic and political authority, are

111 E.g. Vernant in Vernant and Vidal Naquet 1986:22 ‘A travers le jeu des dialogues, la confrontation des protagonistes avec le chœur, les renversements de situation au fil du drame, le héros légendaire, chanté en gloire par l’épopée, devient sur la scène du théâtre l’objet d’un débat. Quand le héros est mis en question devant le public, c’est l’homme grec qui, en ce v^e siècle athénien, dans et par le spectacle tragique, se découvre lui-même problématique; cf. ‘le “discours ambigu” d’Ajax’ (13).

112 Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1972: ‘Préface,’ cf. 11-17.

113 Vernant and Vidal-Naquet *loc. cit.*

114 Croally 1994:11, 2.

115 Meier 1988:9f.

most easily in danger of projecting our own habits of exploring, challenging, questioning, and probing, into our object of study, expecting the Attic dramatists to do the same. In addition we seriously neglect the fundamental difference between this ritual theatre and our own, 'aesthetic,' theatre as I would call it, which we are completely free to visit.¹¹⁶ Here, in spite of our involvement in the action we essentially keep an aesthetic distance to the events presented and as an audience we are expected to perceive a conscious message conveyed in the drama. Our attitude towards art in general is emphatically individualistic and our age of rapid change one of self-examination and self-reflexivity. According to David Napier 'we live in a constant state of self-definition, in which reflection, for all that this word means, is not only a desirable state but a moral imperative' (emphasis in the original).¹¹⁷

Interpretations of Greek tragedy often assume that this mythical story telling was *exploring* our inner ambiguities and paradoxes. However, interpreting tragic drama as the presentation of 'moral ambiguities,'¹¹⁸ reveals an intellectual and aesthetic or 'flat' understanding of tragedy, like observing a document, a piece of paper and discounting the specific tragic effect in its original audience. The (unquestioned) notion that tragedy stages ambiguity stems from Vernant too, and is found in e.g. the work of Simon Goldhill. Referring to the *Bakkhai* Goldhill observes 'Dionysos' sphere would seem to encompass precisely the sense of paradox The tragic texts seem designed to leave an audience with a question (as often

116 Schechner 1983:137 (Schechner's distinction between ritual and theatre corresponds to my ritual theatre vs. aesthetic theatre):

'EFFICACY <	> ENTERTAINMENT
Ritual	Theatre
results	fun
links to an absent Other	only for those here
abolishes time	symbolic time emphasizes now
brings the Other here	audience is the Other
performer possessed, in trance	performer knows what he is doing
audience participates	audience watches
audience believes	audience appreciates
criticism is forbidden	criticism is encouraged
collective creativity	individual creativity'

Furthermore Schechner characterises our modern theatre as a performance in which psychological means are prominent and authenticity (in the sense of ritual efficacy) is lacking, 'This use of psychology is a reflection of our preoccupation with the individual In a society as large and wealthy as ours only aesthetic theatre is possible' (136), in contrast to among other theatre forms classical Athenian drama (127, 139). Schieffelin 1998:202f. maintains that popular assumptions about the nature of the relationship between theatre audience and performers are ethnocentric and should not be extended to cultural performances in other cultures.

117 Napier 1992:32. Cf. the extremely individualistic and intellectualistic approach by Croally 1994.

118 Cf. Buxton 1994:197 '... in tragedy expression is given to the rich moral ambiguities latent in the bare narratives about some of the heroes.'

as not about the legitimation of social positions). It is here in the potential *undermining of a secure and stable sense of norm ...* that the most unsettling thrust of tragedy may be located' (emphasis in the original).¹¹⁹

Again our perception of the artist as somebody radically separated from society and 'declaring his exclusion from the masses' is a *modern* notion. According to Napier our expectations of the artist are shaped by 'the [modern] desire for individual discovery and the romantic passion for the socially disenfranchised.'¹²⁰ So perhaps we should allow the *ancient* dramatists to cooperate with their community in creating the basic values of their society.

We should beware of interpreting this ritual theatre in individualistic psychological terms too. When Greek culture does present 'the other' this is not in opposition to 'the self,' that is 'me,' but to 'us, our normal world order, our valuable way of being and doing,' the cultural dimension of the self. Nor is the intended emotional effect of tragedy to be identified with the individual's reaction, which varied according to the various personalities in the audience, as Richard Buxton asserts. Speaking about myths in general, he states '... the chief and in my view unsurmountable difficulty for unitarians, especially those panpsychists who deal in universal symbols, lies in the extraordinary plurality of tones on offer in Greek mythology No explanation of a single emotional effect or a single psychological function can hope to cover the fantastic aesthetic variety of these tales.'¹²¹

While I would not deny the empirical fact of individual diversity and the plurality of personal responses, I maintain that it was an important aspect of tragic 'myths' that they *prescribed* the specifically stylised tragic sentiments, just as comedy *prescribed* reactions of laughter. These assumptions are not mysterious or reductionist. Folk-tales and other traditional genres work upon different sentiments, and we have to take these intended reactions into account because they are part of the meaning of the tale. According to Hassan El-Shamy '... the affective components of lore must be examined first as learned "sentiments"' before seeking explanations in biologically based "emotions" (e.g. psychoanalytic interpretations)' (El-Shamy 1997: 233).

Old comedy, being an instance of the modulation of the audience's reactions, staged the liberation from hierarchies and social constraints, from disturbing elements and anxieties, in a joyous celebration of vitality, incorporated in the invincible hero, marriage (*gamos*), feasting and plenty (*komos*).

We are familiar with this idea that comedy aimed at provoking various kinds of laughter. In the same way tragedy aimed at provoking tragic shock and horror as

119 Goldhill 1990:128.

120 Napier 1992:31, 21.

121 Buxton 1994:216f.

well as 'katharsis.' This ritual theatre, I suggest, was not just *staging* 'myths,' (cf. Vernant's apodictic 'les tragédies, bien entendu, ne sont pas des mythes'¹²²) it *was* a 'myth,' that is, a living symbolic performance of traditional as well as ludic tales involving the participants in a collective experience. It drew them into its Dionysiac trance modulating their reactions through tragic shock and comic jubilation, while in the course of satyr drama slightly detaching the audience from the mythical world.¹²³ As such it modulated the audience's distance towards the dramatic events. Ritual theatre may flow between close experience of the metaphysical powers as being present and consciousness of a fictitious world.¹²⁴

It is meaningful to think of tragic and comic theatre in ancient Athens as presenting traditional or ludic personae on stage and engaging the audience in horrible or ridiculous events, which, according to Aristotle eventually lead to 'katharsis,' a release of a definite kind. As I have argued elsewhere, tragic drama did not present problems to reflect upon or philosophical theses. It invaded the cultural reflexes of the audience with the horrifying violation (the tragic 'inversion') of the normal order of social institutions, sometimes followed by their 'restoration.' By presenting these violations of the world order the theatre performance engaged the audience in revitalising their cultural sentiments to these institutions.¹²⁵ The *Helene* e.g. does not stage the heroine's reflection or suffering, but the objective violation of the institution of marriage, in particular the respectability and fidelity of the wife, the union of the marital couple, and the installation in their proper *oikos*. All these elements are initially threatened or violated. In the course of the action all violations are dissolved and the drama ends in a joyous 'restoration' of the world order.¹²⁶ The *Trojan Women* does not make a statement about the horrors of war and the suffering of civilians. The drama invaded the audience with a horrible inversion of the normal order, when the 'warrior' is present defending wife and children.

I will maintain, then, that Greek tragedy was 'mythical and symbolic' in a complex sense. Firstly it staged versions of the traditional tales. And secondly it created a tragic process guiding the audience through a horrific violation of their cultural senses of normality, validity and value, operating in a symbolic process. In other celebrations no doubt different reactions were expected, and the imagination and emotions were moulded in other ways. We are familiar with the 'iambic,' that is,

122 'Tragedies are not, of course, myths,' Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988:7.

123 Bouvrie 1993a; cf. Aronen 1992.

124 See the discussion of Yoruba tradition in Nigeria by Götrick 1993, 'Edungun apidan—rituell teater.'

125 Bouvrie 1988, 1990a, 1993b.

126 Bouvrie 1990a, 289-313; cf. Bouvrie 1991.

contemptive mood of lyrical forms, a genre embedded in sympotic culture, the 'encomic' mood of victory odes, and other examples may be found.

Literature and 'myth'

With these examples I have addressed the distinction that is usually made between 'myth' and 'literature,' with the connotations 'primitive' and 'sophisticated,' a distinction, I think, convenient to modern developments rather than accounting for the Ancient world or other pre-modern societies. Our notion of literature does influence our perception of myth in general, and this is why frequently a boundary is established between myth, that is, oral telling and 'literature.'¹²⁷ Vernant, while drawing the distinction between oral and literary myth, still stresses the social role of these literary works.¹²⁸

One necessary condition for separating between primitive and advanced literary forms is the idea that 'primitive' societies do not foster outstanding artists, a view I think is fundamentally biased (*Cf. BMCR* review of Calame by Michael Clarke, 18.12.2000). Another underlying idea is the notion of the poet dissenting with the traditional outlook of his society, a view I already have called into question. We should accept the idea that the great works of ancient literature may be 'mythical' in the sense of working through symbolic processes in their community.

Another distinction is seen between genuine and not-genuine religious texts. 'Real' myths are coached in a religious atmosphere. According to Veyne 'la mythologie grecque, dont la liaison avec la religion était des plus lâches, n'a pas été au fond autre chose qu'un genre littéraire très populaire.'¹²⁹ Of course here modern notions of genuine religious expression influence our view. However we should not separate genres according to what we would think fit in a religious service and what not. The range of such expressions and sentiments may be much wider in other societies than our own. This is not to deny the differences noticed in epigraphical and literary expressions of the divine, as has been noticed by Harvey Yunis and Jon Mikalson.¹³⁰ While written texts in Greek tradition may fall short of what we consider to be religious expression (the existence of liturgic texts, other than hymns and prayers, is doubtful), or lack the tone of epigraphical sources, they may still be symbolic in nature.

¹²⁷ An example of this perception is 'the literary reworkings of myth,' Zaidman and Pantel 1992:143.

¹²⁸ Vernant 1990:24f. 'L'activité littéraire, qui prolongue et modifie, par le recours à l'écriture, une tradition très ancienne de poésie orale, occupe dans la vie social et spirituelle de la Grèce une place centrale. Il ne s'agit pas d'un simple divertissement personnel, d'un luxe réservé à une élite savante, mais d'une véritable institution faisant office de mémoire social, d'un instrument de conservation et de communication du savoir dont le rôle est décisif.'

¹²⁹ Veyne 1983:28.

¹³⁰ Yunis 1988; Mikalson 1991.

André Lardinois envisages ‘the possibility that our cherished distinction between “myth” and “logos,” which is now often interpreted historically, is in fact a reflection of a generic distinction between narrative poetry, like epics or tragedy, and a didactic tradition based on speeches and reason.’¹³¹ What Lardinois has noticed, is the difference between ‘myths’ as didactic and as a non-didactic (traditional) tales. In Lardinois’ analysis ‘real’(?) myth does not operate in a didactic explicit mode, it just tells the story which mirrors a world, in the hero learns through suffering.¹³²

Lardinois’ observations are interesting since they demonstrate a growing awareness of the fleeting nature of the boundary between ‘myth’ (traditional tale) and ‘logos,’ of the implicit meanings of ‘symbolic tales,’ as well as of the complexity of the genres under discussion. Now we should beware of uncritically assuming that the workings reside in the way the hero learns from suffering, which I think is a modern protestant idea, or that the audience learned something of the kind. The focusing on suffering seems to me to reflect our modern Western notion of the individual’s responsibility. Such a view of the nature of ‘mythical’ tales situates the audience again in a position of reflection, at a modern and aesthetic distance from the events presented, and passively receiving the poet’s message. We should instead consider the symbolic aspect of the epic work as a constant crossing of cultural boundaries, thereby conveying its implicit message. The *Odyssey* guided its audience through a disrupted world of the *oikos*, gradually restoring this world to its proper order.¹³³

The *Iliad*, in my view, offers a similar development as the *Odyssey*, revitalising the notions of heroic existence as opposed to the non-heroic, in a way dealing with the conditions of survival for the *polis*.¹³⁴ Starting with a disruption of the proper honour of ‘the ideal warrior,’ in the violent quarrel between the central hero and his opponent which demolishes his status, the fundamental elements and values of

131 ‘Myth versus Logos. A Generic contest between Homer and Hesiod?’ (Lardinois 1996:11). Lardinois suggests that ‘Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are essentially myths with a lot of speeches; Hesiod’s *Works and Days* is a speech with some myths ... this generic difference comprises a different outlook on life, which prefigures the later opposition between “myth” and “logos.” In Hesiod, myths are used as *paradeigmata* to further the argument ...’ while ‘there are didactic speeches in Homer, for example Phoenix’s speech in Book Nine of the *Iliad*, ... but speeches are shown to be ineffective.’

132 ‘In Homer, on the other hand, myth is the main course and neither the *Iliad* nor the *Odyssey* is ostensibly didactic ... they rather contemplate the world, which is viewed as essentially tragic ... The epic hero, like his tragic counterpart, does not learn from speeches, but from suffering and it is suffering (*παθήματα*) which are recorded in the myth’ (Lardinois 1996:11).

133 Cf. Vidal-Naquet’s analysis of the *Odyssey* (Vidal-Naquet 1983a = 1986a).

134 As Marilyn Arthur has shown the *Iliad* crosses the boundaries between male vs. female worlds (Arthur 1981).

this central symbol in Greek society are charged with value. While the plot carries the audience through the concrete fates of Akhilleus, (Diomedes), and Hektor, the heroes become interchangeable in the symbolic progress of the tale violating and restoring this symbol of the 'superior warrior.' By withdrawing from battle his value as a warrior is emphasised, the situation in a sense bringing the war to a 'standstill,' creating an ebb and flow between the armies without any decisive result. It is this to and fro between success and defeat which highlights the value of the (absent) warrior (Diomedes seeming to constitute a pervasive positive background).

By returning and gaining renewed recognition in positive action the hero confirms his status. This status as paramount warrior being connected with the condition of an early death is opposed to the status of inferior warriors, who will die in old age. In other sequences the emphasis is laid upon other aspects of 'the ideal warrior,' his function as a defender of the polis being visualised in the person of Hektor. The deadly earnest of this task is underscored by the foreshadowing of the hero's as well as the city's doom. It is not by accident that Akhilleus' and Hektor's death are conditioned upon each other. At the dramatic level their fates are interconnected, at the symbolic level the two concrete manifestations of the warrior symbol are fused. While the Akhaian hero does not die himself within the scope of the tale, 'the ideal warrior' does in the person of Hektor, attracting all the praise and lamenting he deserves as a heroic defender of the city.

The *Iliad* does not teach in a conscious reflective way, the audience was provoked in its cultural reflexes, it first experienced an outrageous 'inversion' of the world order in the symbol of 'the superior warrior.' Subsequently it witnessed the abundant honour and *kleos* lavished on the 'hero' after his death. While at its dramatic level perhaps offering a tragic (in the sense of undeserved) suffering, at the symbolic level the *Iliad* parades a violation and the positive 'restoration' of the warrior's value. Just as the *Odyssey* offers the violation of heroic existence at the *oikos* (at Ithaka) and the various defective worlds (in Odysseus' narrative) leading to the 'restoration' of the *oikos* and the world order, to the initial horror and subsequent comforting of the audience.¹³⁵

Here the issue of the nature of oral vs. written literature may be raised once more. However, whether a tale was conceived in an oral or literate mode does not seem to be the crucial distinction within our context, and the question should therefore be reformulated, I think, into emphasising the reception of the tale. In this respect we should keep in mind Burkert's concept of 'eine angewandte Erzählung.' Not the mode of production of the tale is decisive, but the way it is received as an important, exciting, or horrifying story, drawing the audience towards its magnetic center.

135 Vidal-Naquet 1983a = 1986a).

Traditional tales vs. non-traditional tales

In this discussion too I would consider briefly the Greek idealistic-romantic novel, a genre belonging definitely to a literary age (although it may have been read aloud to the audience of a household).¹³⁶ While these tales do not present traditional mythical heroes, there may still be reasons to ask how the Greek novels relate to the categories of 'myth' and symbolic tale? The lack of traditional material is a feature the novel shares with New comedy. Still both genres present a fascination with a fundamental Greek preoccupation: chastity. This virtue, which first and foremost applies to females, is in some of the novels a virtue of the male hero as well, and it seems to me that this fascination amounts to what we may call a cultural or key symbol. This value complex guarantees the citizen-body in maintaining its exclusive privileges within the confines of the family and citizen group. The pervasive fascination with chastity, which is typical of all these novels, creates the obstacles and dénouements of the tale. The norm of marital fidelity is central even when it seems to be broken.

In Khariton's novel the heroine cannot remain faithful to her husband, while she is captured and sold to another husband. Still it is significant that Kallirhoe bears a child which is without any doubt her original husband's, and in this way the tale is signalling the crucial function of fidelity, being the clue to identifying fatherhood.

The fascination with the motif of marital fidelity and female chastity, which is so dominant in the novel, is also important in tragic drama, as well as in New comedy. In New comedy chastity is challenged but restored, when the heroine is recognized and rescued as a born citizen. In tragic as well as comic plots the legitimacy of offspring may be at stake, (e.g. in Euripides' *Ion*). Tragedy stages males while comedy generally highlights females. As I have argued elsewhere, these central aspects of the *oikos* institution were the symbols revitalized in the ritual theatre, and I would suggest, this was the case in the novel too, although in a different manner.¹³⁷ Unlike Ben Edwin Perry, who interprets the novel as an escapist genre,¹³⁸ I will suggest that the Hellenistic novel served a symbolic aim in uniting the Hellenic communities in their dispersed existence throughout a foreign world. The genre as a whole may tell us something about the audience's need for preserving their Hellenic identity through a narrative abundant in signs of Hellenism, literature, religion and so forth. Far from being just a form of entertainment the novel emphatically brings the Hellenic world to the forefront, and draws its audience to-

¹³⁶ Hägg 1994.

¹³⁷ Cf. Bouvrie 1988, 1990a 1991, 1993b.

¹³⁸ Perry 1967:36ff.

wards the perennial fascination of the legitimacy of offspring. The peculiar detail of male chastity and fidelity, as demonstrated in the figure of Theagenes (in Heliodoros' novel), in particular, but also in Khariton's Khaireas, may be interpreted as part of the general fascination with boundary-building. Female chastity created the boundary between legitimate offspring and bastards in the *oikos*, as well as between citizens and not-citizens in the polis, guaranteeing the social order within the Hellenic world. The male-chastity-motif may be due to similar symbolic pressure. A phantasy of males remaining faithful to their (faithful) Hellenic wives (or a pseudo-Hellenic ideal-world wife in the person of Kharikleia), demarcates Greek from non-Greek, preserving the purity of the group, its 'chastity' and cultural 'endogamy'.¹³⁹ While these assumptions must remain speculative, I would suggest that the occurrence of 'symbolic tales' may be widespread and manifest themselves at unexpected moments.

As has been argued earlier, traditional tales (myth) and symbolic phenomena are not isomorphic categories. Traditional tales may cease to be symbolic, to draw the audience towards their magnetic centre, and new, fictitious, tales may become charged with symbolic power. Nor are symbolic tales always neatly separable from discursive speech. This may be the reason why Calame wishes to include 'the argumentative and rational functions' in his definition of 'myth,' while, likewise, Lincoln includes argumentative elements in his definition of 'discourse' (closely related to symbolic phenomena). In the wide sense ascribed to it by Lincoln, 'discourse is not only an instrument of persuasion, operating along rational (or pseudo-rational) and moral (or pseudo-moral) lines, but it is also an instrument of sentiment evocation.'¹⁴⁰ This argumentative activity may however rest on a non-argued for basis, some premiss which is taken for granted, hence his qualification 'pseudo-rational,' a phenomenon I would identify as symbolic workings.

I suspect that symbolic 'pressure' can emerge in the course of argumentative discourse, as traditional tales can be employed in arguing and moralising, that is, in a rational mode of thinking. We should not thus distinguish 'myth' (in the sense of specific tales) and history, according to our criteria of miraculous/factual or irrational/rational, (and improper, 'scandalous'/proper). This distinction is not the important and interesting one. What is really at stake, is the nature of symbolic workings in contrast to arguing and moralising, that is with its appeal to conscious judgement and decision making.

We may then conceive of the appearance and workings of symbolism in a complex and fluid manner, as is the case with Herodotean historiography, where the

¹³⁹ Bouvrie 1992.

¹⁴⁰ Calame 1996b, Lincoln 1989:8; cf. '... it is through ... ideological persuasion and sentiment evocation that discourse holds the capacity to shape and reshape society' (9).

symbolic ordering of the world along an axis of Greek normality/otherness imperceptibly protrudes in a rational account of foreign cultures.¹⁴¹ The rational account of historical events, conditions and customs reaches at times a symbolic cadence, gathering the Hellenic audience in a synchronised vibration of cultural awe when Herodotos' reports of foreign peoples amount to transgressions across the Hellenic sense of naturalness and honour.

One may wonder in what way this symbolic pressure on 'otherness' differs from that emerging in the mythical presentation of Aiskhylos' *Prometheus*. In this drama the world is mapped out in the descriptions of Io's wanderings in an orbit around Argos, the normally ordered world whence Io has departed. In Prometheus' prophecy Io's wanderings operate like a radar mapping on its screen all disturbances and abnormalities, regions which do not know agriculture or *xenia*, nor marriage, that is, representing sub-human forms of life. Scyths do not know how to plow, Khalybes and Amazons violate other forms of normal life. In the second drama, it seems from the fragments, Herakles' exploits were foretold in a similar way presenting, however, the super-human forms of existence found among the righteous Gabioi, law-abiding Scythians, Hesperids, and god-fearing and long-living Hyperboreans.¹⁴²

Not only traditional and non-traditional, (non-mythical) tales then may manifest symbolic pressure, explicitly rational arguments may do so as well, as the studies of Herodotean historiography have demonstrated. And, it seems, so may even philosophic discourse. We may *e.g.* wonder whether the philosophical work of Aristotle manifests symbolic elements, when, in his account of the Spartan state's degeneration (Arist. *Pol.* 2, 1269B 12ff.), he implies the evil effects of female economic rights for the development of the polis. This record shows features of the 'myth of matriarchy,' tales which tell of the disastrous effects of women's rule in primordial time.¹⁴³ This kind of myths justifies the subordination of women ever after.¹⁴⁴ An example is the myth of Kekrops (which is found in Augustinus *De civitate Dei* 8:9) telling how the Athenians restrained their women after the whole population had voted for a patron deity and women being in the majority chose Athena, thereby causing Poseidon to flood the territory of Attika.

141 Hartog 1980; Rosellini and Saïd 1978. Vidal-Naquet signals a similar tendency in Diodoros Siculus (Vidal-Naquet 1991:xxii).

142 Bouvrie 1993b:213f.; Bouvrie 1996:1.

143 Bouvrie 1990b.

144 Zeitlin 1978 = 1984, citing Bamberger 1974.

How should we distinguish 'mythos' from logos?

Thus far we have seen that symbolic tales or ritualised action represent a complex and complicated object of study, entailing the structuring in conceptual systems, and the collective modulation of sentiments in symbolic performances. 'Mythos' and 'logos' may run parallel or be intertwined, and the fact that symbolic phenomena are concrete, evocative, imaginative, and affective suggests that they involve other functions and faculties than conscious cognition and decision-making.

However, we are still left with the question of the precise relationship between symbolic and rational thinking and the question whether symbolic tales in fact constitute a separate category of thought. Of course the answer will depend on what we are thinking of when we apply the expression 'pensée mythique, pensiero mitico, mythisches Denken, mythical thinking.'

The question of distinguishing 'mythos' from 'logos' or symbolic expression from rational thought should then be addressed in a more systematic way. In order to handle this problem we have to establish a distinction between the social as well as the biological aspects of the phenomena we are discussing, their why and how. The distinction between symbolic (mythical) and rational thought may at first be considered as a social question, the way we apprehend and act within our social world. Next it is a question of what human faculties we draw upon, the psychological question. I will first address the question of the social aspects of the 'mythos'—'logos' distinction, with an obvious point stated by the anthropologist Richard Shweder: 'Whereas all peoples assert beliefs, true and false, ordinary language and thought aims to do more than merely report and represent the causal structure of reality.'¹⁴⁵ Besides rationality, which has irrationality as its counterpart, a failure to apply the standards that have been set for rational reasoning, there is always this third category, which Shweder labels the non-rational.¹⁴⁶ Pointing to the inevitably arbitrariness of culture Shweder stresses the fundamental fact that people create 'frames, paradigms, constitutive presuppositions,' that is 'statement[s] about the world whose validity can be neither confirmed nor disconfirmed.'¹⁴⁷ In spite of this fact, we as humans are incessantly driven to 'prove' the improvable, to anchor our culturally created view of the world. The rules of a culture may be explicit, but this is not necessarily so.¹⁴⁸ The more fundamental the rules, the more they are implicit.¹⁴⁹ These patterns and rules are not unlike our grammatical knowledge, and are part of our 'tacit knowledge.'¹⁵⁰ The rational and descriptive is thus complemented

145 Shweder 1984a:12.

146 Shweder 1984b:38ff. 'where the canons of rationality, validity, truth, and efficiency are simply beside the point— irrelevant ... there is something more to thinking than reason and evidence—culture, the arbitrary, the symbolic, the expressive, the semiotic— ... a realm where man is free to create his own distinctive symbolic universe.'

147 Shweder 1984b:40.

by the non-rational normative meanings of culture, which are ‘shared, collective, supra-individual’ and organized.¹⁵¹ These shared meanings are often ‘disguised in symbolic forms.’¹⁵² We should then distinguish the rational, instrumental, argumentative (and innumerable other kinds of) thinking from the non-rational, cultural creation of shared meanings.

These patterns, however, should not be understood as just offering a conceptualising of the world.¹⁵³ When studying ‘symbolic tales,’ then, we should not only investigate the way they structure the world in classificatory systems but also their possible directive and evocative aspects. Ioan Lewis warns against exclusively conceiving of symbols as a sign language.¹⁵⁴ In symbolic activity not only are the actions of the participants stylised, there are prescribed states of feeling as well, modelled into sentiments according to culturally valid patterns. Relating this to the subcategory of ‘symbolic tale,’ we may assume that the tone that is evoked in the tale should be given proper attention. This aspect might as well account for the distinction between *e.g.* folk-tale and ‘myth’ within our cultural area, the one inducing hopeful belief in chance, a lucky fate, the other, based upon the serious be-

148 LeVine 1984:76 ‘[people] take for granted as self-evident responses to what is and what ought to be ... what informants find difficult to verbalize is more important, fundamental in the cultural organization of ideas than what they can verbalize.’

149 ‘Much of culture is not recoverable through straitforward ethnographic interviewing’ (Levine 1984:77).

150 Sperber 1975:x.

151 LeVine 1984:72 ‘The “shreds and patches” concept of culture has simply not survived the test of intensive field investigation, because the ethnographer ... discovers the orderliness not only in their communicative conventions but in their version of “common sense,” the framework of ideas from which they view, and act upon, the world. The framework ... is an organized set of contexts from which customary beliefs and practices derive their meaning.’

152 LeVine, 1984:77.

153 Cultural meaning systems, according to Roy D’Andrade (1984:89), are more than ‘purely representational in character,’ these meaning systems ‘have directive and evocative as well as representational functions,’ that is, they direct our actions and evoke cultural feelings. *Cf.* ‘Meanings represent the world, create cultural entities, direct one to do certain things, and evoke certain feelings. These four functions of meaning—the *representational*, the *constructive*, the *directive*, and the *evocative*—are differentially elaborated in particular meaning systems, but are always present to some degree in any system’ (96). *Cf.* ‘... ideas, feelings, and intentions are all activated by symbols and are thus part of the meaning of symbols. In general, there are a variety of lines of evidence that indicate that any human system of meaning is likely to involve affect’ (99).

154 Lewis 1977:1f. ‘that symbols possess a cognitive aspect which is legitimately explored in this fashion [Lévi-Strauss] is not in question. But the danger is that, infatuated with this style of analysis, we should forget that the ultimate force of symbols depends at least as much on their power to stir the emotions, moving men to action and reaction.’ *Cf.* ‘This excessive emphasis on thinking and cognitive processes neglects, or seriously underestimates, the powerful emotional charge which all effective symbols carry ... the study of symbols must include the study of sentiments’ (Preface:vii).

lief in inexorable doom.¹⁵⁵ Still we have to notice what audience is addressed. So traditional images, known as *mundus inversus* images, staging 'lamb eats wolf,' 'stag hunts hunter,' 'ox slaughters butcher,' 'peasant riding-king walking,' 'wife scourges husband' *etc.*, have served as an expression of revolt among the poor, while in another age and milieu they undermined the subversive effect, rousing laughter at the idea of revolt.¹⁵⁶

Anthropologists studying the telling or staging of tales in their living context are in a fortunate position, because they can still observe the affective tone of the telling or dramatising situation, as well as the level of authority assigned to the tale. This may often result in the mapping out of a wide range of genres. An example is Gary Gossen's study of the Chamula tradition in Chiapas, Mexico, a people speaking Tzotzil, a Maya language. This culture which ranges its speech performances along a scale running from 'cold' to 'hot' tales, corresponding to the cosmic hierarchy centering around the sun (!), acknowledges different kinds of verbal behaviour, which are increasingly stylized. 'Competent language use, like the sun, is characterized by measure, controlled patterns of intensity.'¹⁵⁷

The symbolically ordered world is not anything given. Our cultural meaning systems need repair, an activity that is incessantly going on everywhere. Unlike statements about the world which it may be sufficient to make once, symbolic messages need to be revived precisely because they do not just present information, but revive the sentiments of the participants.¹⁵⁸ What is fundamental about 'symbolic tales' is not their meaning, being either true or false, but their effect, in Bourdieu's terms their 'efficacité.' He would not speak of 'meaning' in the sense of

155 Peradotto 1973:57.

156 Kunzle 1978.

157 Gossen 1989:391. Gossen offers a very interesting catalogue of recognized genres of speech, which distinguishes, for example, 'Recent words: true recent narrative' and 'Recent words: frivolous language'. The 'true recent narrative' genre is performed by 'speakers [who] are excited' (400) using redundancy and 'speech for people whose hearts are heated.' 'What "true recent narrative" accomplishes with prose accounts of true breaches of the social order, "frivolous language" accomplishes with laughter. The genre consists of five subgenres All of these express or refer to ambiguous or deviant behavior, and elicit laughter from participants and onlookers. Laughter appears to underline the norm by placing the deviant or ambiguous item of behavior in sharp relief against the norm' (404f.). The performance of 'Ancient words: true ancient narrative' shares many properties with the 'true recent narrative' genre, the important difference being the temporal dimension, while ancient words refer to the first three creations, before the present fourth in Chamula cosmology. This genre, referring to the crucial, basic knowledge, is characterised by greater stylistic redundancy and metaphorical restatement of an idea (408), and it is near the 'Ancient words: prayer' genre, which carries still greater metaphorical heat (409).

158 D'Andrade 1984:105 notes 'In most human groups the communication of messages, both framed [telling what the original message is about] and unframed, is so frequent that it suggests the hypothesis that meaning systems need messages to keep themselves alive. Without relatively constant activation perhaps meaning systems disintegrate.'

some cognitive content, but their 'effect' in transforming people's notions of themselves and the world.¹⁵⁹ Here we may identify the 'aim' of symbolic tales.

Furthermore there are the hidden effects of symbols, diverting the attention away from their essence.¹⁶⁰ And the way symbolic meaning systems also tend to offer concrete tales thereby shielding themselves from being discussed overtly and exposed to attack.¹⁶¹ A basic property of symbolic processes is this dissimulation of the fact that they are symbolic in the sense of carrying cultural—that is arbitrary—meaning.

We may here think of Bourdieu's notion of 'doxa,' the undiscussed. It is precisely because of this dissimulation that the category of 'myth' is such an elusive entity. Myths cease to work at the moment they are recognised. In Bourdieu's terms, the most fundamental 'ideas' in society are those, which are withdrawn from open discourse and exchange of (orthodox and heterodox) opinions.¹⁶² Belonging to the opaque realm of the 'undiscussed (undisputed)' or 'doxa,' fundamental cultural truths are removed from the vision of the members of society, and relegated to a status of 'nature.' However, what I think is most important in his model of the workings of culture, is not the realm of the undiscussed, implicit meanings, values, or structures, but the borderline between the realms of 'opinion' and the 'undiscussed (undisputed).' It is this borderline, which in reality manifests itself in a number of (unconscious) practices, which merits our attention. And it is here that the proper arena for 'symbolic phenomena' is to be found, filling a difficult task of transmitting the culturally valued, and at the same time dissimulating that it is this they are doing.

159 Speaking about initiation rites Bourdieu (1982:124) underscores '... l'efficacité symbolique est tout à fait réelle en ce qu'elle transforme tout à fait la personne consacrée.' Cf. 'La croyance de tous, qui préexiste le rituel, est la condition de l'efficacité du rituel' (133).

160 Bourdieu analyses male initiation, contrary to other analyses not by emphasising the passage itself, separating the initiated from the uninitiated, the real focus of interest for analysis is the unnoticed borderline dividing those who are eligible to being initiated from those (females) who are not. 'L'effet majeure du rite est celui qui passe le plus complètement inaperçu' (1982:122). In this way the ritual diverts the attention from the heart of the matter to some unimportant element, the passage, thereby consecrating or naturalising an arbitrary distinction between (socially) male and female.

161 This is what Moore and Myerhoff refer to, when explaining the 'presentational' quality of symbolic phenomena (1977:8).

162 Bourdieu 1977:168. The term 'idea' is here misleading, because Bourdieu himself is eager to stress that one of the fundamental vehicles for cultural patterns is in fact the body with its senses and sentiments, carrying our 'habitus.'

How does 'mythical' vs. logical thought operate?

The question whether symbolic tales in fact exist must be followed into the field of psychology. The social processes are after all created by individual minds and therefore there is a continuum between the collective shaping of culture and individual psyches.¹⁶³ After our discussion on the 'why' of symbolic phenomena in the social world, we have to address the 'how,' the recurring question whether there does exist something like a distinction between 'mythical thought, la pensée mythique, mythisches Denken, il pensiero mitico' on the one hand, and rational thinking on the other. In some quarters it is answered in the affirmative, but sometimes it is firmly denied,¹⁶⁴ while others ignore the issue. This question has already been reformulated into the statement that 'myth' is not to be conceived of as the opposite of 'logos' as irrationality, because it does not handle falsifiable propositions. As a non-rational ordering of the world, symbolic phenomena fulfil the complex task of creating culture.¹⁶⁵ The problem then arises, what are in fact 'symbolic phenomena' in psychological terms?

While we are well acquainted with the functioning of conscious and logical reasoning, most of us have only vague knowledge of the symbolic mode of ordering the world. Cultural phenomena are mostly studied as social entities, while their possible psychological properties have not been subjected to an equal amount of investigation.¹⁶⁶ While I do not pretend to have an expert's command of neurobiology, I think we have to consider the data available from the field of psychology, which are sufficiently mapped out to be incorporated in the study of symbolic phenomena.

What comes first to mind are the 'primary processes' as studied by Sigmund Freud, a category of reactions to the world, which is opposed to 'secondary processes.'¹⁶⁷ Freud associated primary processes mainly with the workings of dreams, in that they operate subconsciously through images instead of conscious verbal thought, that is, secondary processes. Freud's theory of the workings of dreams, then, stresses first and foremost their imaginative nature, their manifestation as images. It includes their tendency to collapse images from different moments in

163 See Lewis 1977.

164 E.g. Buxton 1994:5 'Nor, emphatically, do I wish to suggest that myths are generated by "the imagination," in the sense of a particular mental faculty, perhaps even to be differentiated from "reason": the existence of such a faculty is quite chimerical.' Detienne and Calame have been mentioned earlier.

165 Shweder, 1984b: 38.

166 Victor Turner has devoted considerable attention to the psychological dimensions of cultural symbols, at first provisionally in his studies referred to earlier, later he incorporated psychological results more systematically into his work (Turner 1985). Inspired by: d'Aquili, Laughlin and McManus 1979. Turner 1977.

167 Freud 1921:435ff. 'Der Primär- und der Sekundärvorgang.'

time thus wiping out temporal and causal relationships (*'condensation'*), furthermore the property of transferring the energy of emotionally charged impressions in real experience to insignificant elements in the dream image (*'displacement'* [of emotional energy]), thus disguising the source of anxiety, and finally the frequent operation of *'inversion'*, the exchange of image-elements according to principles of similarity and contrast.

Freud's focus of interest was of course to account for the operation of the dynamic subconscious, the psyche's urge to shield our real but socially unacceptable impulses from becoming manifest to ourselves and disturbing us in our sleep. The images thus masking our real self he labelled 'symbols,' which he in the course of time came to identify as masks for our erotic impulses, a content he did not identify in the earliest phase of his thinking on dream processes. This narrowing down of what initially was conceived of as a wide range of dream motives has created an unfortunate barrier of scepticism around the theory. It has been criticised by Charles Rycroft, who thinks anthropologists still should pay attention to the very abstract notions which have been formulated about the workings of dreams.¹⁶⁸ In an attempt at modifying the theory of dreams to a theory of culture Percy Cohen suggests that cultural symbolisations (e.g. tales) may draw on materials which are stored in the dynamic unconscious (i.e. forbidden impulses and dreams).¹⁶⁹ This suggestion still departs from the assumption that 'primary processes' manifest themselves in dreams only, and that their function characteristically is that of disguising erotic impulses. These assumptions, according to Rycroft, are too narrow, and we should then return to Freud's earlier concept of symbols as representations of 'everything that comprises man's biological destiny.'¹⁷⁰

There is another aspect to this problem. We have been told that the Freudian dynamic unconscious mind is a mechanism which works in order to shield our unacceptable drives against society's censure. However, if the theory of symbolic/dream/primary processes maintains that these processes are operating in order to disguise our hidden drives when confronted with censure, *the same theory does not seem to explain where this inner censure stems from*, it is simply taken for granted.¹⁷¹

168 Rycroft 1977.

169 Cohen 1980:65f. 'in societies in which people are closer to nature and to natural processes ... there will be a greater and more obvious tendency for certain processes of cultural symbolisation to call upon the resources of the dynamic unconscious.'

170 Rycroft 1977:139.

171 Freud 1921:99ff. where the author represents the nature of 'die Zensur', that is, our internalised inhibitions, offering as his 'argument' only the analogy of a situation when somebody is dissimulating ('sich entstellt') out of fear of a more powerful person and the analogy of writers fearing political censure. No psychological mechanisms are invoked in order to demonstrate the *establishment* of censure.

Can it be that the norms and rules of society have been installed in our mind through the very same processes? Instead of taking for granted that censure simply is operating, we may assume that it has been established in our psyche through the same complicated processes as our defense mechanisms, creating the ‘summarising and elaborating’ symbols, with their *culturally shaped sentiments* of what is valuable, normal or honourable and their counterparts.

There are reasons to accept such an assumption. Not only does Rycroft claim that ‘symbolism [in the Freudian sense of ‘primary processes’] is a general capacity of the mind,’¹⁷² there are other scholars who argue in the same direction. Dan Sperber studying the relationship between our rational and our symbolic processing capacities, defends the latter against a pervasive suspicion of primitivity.¹⁷³ As a matter of fact Freud, even though he demonstrates deep fascination with dream processes, consistently refers to these human capacities as something phylogenetically as well as ontogenetically primordial and primitive, prior to conscious, verbal reasoning manifesting itself in the secondary processes.¹⁷⁴ There is, according to Sperber, no reason to assume this priority (and hence primitivity) of our imaginative faculty, which Rycroft describes as a capacity ‘which can be used both by the discursive, syntactical, rational form of thinking characteristic of waking, intellectual activity (“secondary process thinking” in psychoanalytical terminology) and by the non-discursive, condensive, affective form of thinking characteristic of dreaming, imagining, joking and creating (“primary process thinking” in psychoanalytical terminology) and by recognising that these two types of thinking are not necessarily opposed to one another, as most formulations of psychoanalytical theory imply, but can work in harness.’¹⁷⁵ It is obvious that the psychic mechanisms at work are extremely complicated, and that we cannot separate the functioning of one half of our brain temporally from the other half. It seems, then, that Freud’s ‘primary processes’ do not only manifest themselves as dreams, they are embedded in various psychic activities.

This is confirmed by a psychological monograph on the phenomenon of ‘intuition’ by Tony Bastick who presents results from psychophysiological experiments

172 Rycroft 1977:139.

173 Sperber 1980:29.

174 Freud 1921:446. We could argue that the theory of primary and secondary processes and their internal hierarchy could be called a modern myth itself, in that it ‘describes’ the ‘nature’ of the human mind, while implicitly confirming a culturally created ordering of mental activities into more and less civilised (corresponding to the widespread dichotomy of ‘male’ and ‘female’ psychic make-up, logical reasoning seen as a masculine prerogative, and unordered and affective thinking as female).

175 Rycroft 1977:139.

which suggest that part of our answers may be found here.¹⁷⁶ The author examines a great number of studies on this human faculty and concludes that it can be contrasted with logical/analytic reasoning by a number of properties. Bastick defends this cognitive faculty of 'intuition' (which he recognises as Freud's 'primary processes'¹⁷⁷ and the functions of the right cerebral hemisphere¹⁷⁸) against prejudices of primitivity, and summarises the properties of this ability, which not only is not primitive, but can be developed as an eminently human faculty of problem solving at the heart of scientific creativity.¹⁷⁹

'The intuitive process is preconscious, but analytic thought is entirely a conscious discipline ... Analytic thought is a linear step-by-step often slow process whereas intuitive thought is sudden and depends on parallel processing of a global field of knowledge, whereas analytic thought only compares two elements at a time ...'¹⁸⁰ Intuition is thus activated when our logic reasoning falls short of solving complex problems. It is at the roots of our conceptualising and creative faculties, the eureka experience of mathematicians and inventors, while operating by similarity and contrast. 'Intuition depends on physiological functions, *e.g.* understanding by feeling and instinct, and most importantly empathy However, pure analytic thought, pure reason, or pure intellect in contrast to intuition is considered to be entirely independent of physiology, *e.g.* machine intelligence. It is considered in this investigation, however, that what generally is called analytic thought is, like all thought, interwoven with our intuitive processes and cannot exist independently.'¹⁸¹ 'Unlike the analytic process of reasoning, intuition is not logical but categorizes on common associated feelings rather than common logical properties ...'¹⁸²

Among the other basic properties of the intuitive process are: preverbal ordering of the world, emotional involvement ('analytic thought is "cold" and emotion-free'), dependent on past experiences and the present situation of the intuiter,

176 Bastick 1982:2 'Intuition is a powerful human faculty, perhaps the most universal natural ability we possess.' In Ch. 1 Bastick reviews the scientific literature of the last 75 years on the subject.

177 Bastick 1982:143, 320, *cf.* 355.

178 Bastick 1982:188, '... the left cerebral hemisphere as linear, time-oriented, rational, analytic, and verbal, with the right hemisphere as non-linear, lateral-thinking, intuitive, artistic, and creative.'

179 Bastick 1982:310.

180 Bastick 1982:51. In the middle ages the distinction between the two modes of cognition were acknowledged as 'ratio' and 'intellectus.' The famous mathematician Henri Poincaré contrasts intuition with logical thought and notes the insufficiency of the latter (Bastick 52). 'We believe that in our reasonings we do no longer appeal to intuition, the philosophers will tell us this is an illusion. Pure logic could never lead us to anything but tautologies; it could create nothing new ... it is by logic that we prove. It is by intuition that we discover' (Poincaré, cited by Bastick 2).

181 Bastick 1982:52

182 Bastick 1982:52.

(‘analytic thought is considered independent of personal experience’), and empathy, kinaesthetic or other, an understanding by feeling.¹⁸³

The fact that our intuitive-creative capacity is something relatively unknown and misunderstood,¹⁸⁴ may be due to the very condition that its paths are withdrawn from verbal conscious reasoning, it represents an ordering and patterning along principles of similarity and contrast, an essential mechanism being the affective charges in concepts which serve as retrieving devices. This evocative process enables us to solve problems (e.g. recognising faces) that are far too complicated for logic-analytical reasoning, and it seems that it serves as the privileged instrument of creativity as well.

Culture being first and foremost something which is ingrained in our senses and nerves appeals to this imaginative-affective ordering faculty when categorising and creating boundaries and contrasts. It would not surprise us then that the cultural process seems to appeal to the same human faculty when it comes to creating shared meanings. Sperber argues that the very richness of responses to a given stimulus causes individual evocations to be idiosyncratic, unless they are restricted into a shared common symbolism during socialisation, an elimination of individual evocation when members of a group learn to prefer the culturally correct evocations, especially in ‘prescribed cultural contexts.’¹⁸⁵ This synchronisation of evocations seems to be the province of ‘symbolic’ tales, ritual and iconography (‘symbolic tales’ being here a shorthand for all sorts of ‘traditional,’ that is, culture-creating tales, drama, jokes and riddles), which intuitively create order without explicitly stating its principles, precisely in order to withdraw them from critical non-affective reasoning, which cannot provide the matrices of culture.¹⁸⁶

Culture then, being a non-rational process, has recourse to the creative ordering abilities of the human mind, the intuitive-primary processes being responsible for our symbolic understanding and ordering of the world. Symbolic workings

183 Tony Bastick, 1982:51.

184 Tony Bastick, 1982:1f., ‘Insight or intuition is relevant to all fields of study and all walks of life. It is a universal experience, little understood but treasured and sought after by all. The intuitions of great men, the “Eureka” experiences that have pushed forward the frontiers of knowledge, that have produced technologies moulding civilization But there has been little investigation into intuition. There seems to have been a spiritual mystique surrounding this invaluable faculty.’

185 Sperber 1980:35 denies that symbolism should be described as a ‘language,’ because its rules are too multifarious to respond to anything like a grammar (34). However in so far as symbolism is something operating in a collective in the sense of shared meanings, it works in the same way as language. ‘Symbolic representation does not demonstrate the truth but presupposes it,’ it is opposed to encyclopedic knowledge. Symbolic knowledge is not empirically verifiable, and immune to falsification. Symbolism is independent of verbalisation, but dependent on conceptualisation and evocation.

186 E.g. d’Aquili and Laughlin 1979.

would thus seem to involve the creation of collective images charged with specific affective qualities. They may explain why there is a remarkable tendency among many groups to couch culturally meaningful messages in a concrete form. This may account for the fact that cultural patterns often are considered to be 'tacit' knowledge, as are the rules of our grammar. In these imaginative expressions causal-temporal ordering seems to be less essential than dimensions of similarity and contrast. We may likewise understand the widespread occurrence of contrastive images and inversions as a major function of intuitive-primary process ordering and disordering. And in particular we may accept the affective qualities of these expressions as something especially apt at creating the boundaries and values of culture.

First conclusions on the definition of 'symbolic tales'

While we may not be able to draw an absolute borderline between 'mythos' and 'logos' in either social or psychological terms, we should at least be entitled to use the distinction analytically. We may separate intuitive-creative thinking as the instrument which is dominant in symbolic processes, as opposed to logical-analytic thinking for instrumental activities. We may sort symbolic expressions whose primary function is to attract audiences towards a magnetic centre ('summarizing symbols') and those which create cultural patterns and order experience or action ('elaborating symbols', in Sherry Ortner's terms), from speech which primarily serves empirical and practical purposes. Intuitive-creative processing is fundamentally imaginative-affective, and phenomena which create culture are operating through affectively charged imagery. It seems that there is a fleeting boundary between the realms of 'mythos' and 'logos.' However, as we have seen, the creation of culture is a process which takes place in darkness, a hidden persuasion that seeks to dissimulate its paths. The process will try to hide the spaces where the cultural, arbitrary symbols of 'naturalness and normality' are being created and modelled.

The boundary between 'mythos' and 'logos,' then, is to be studied in the area of tales which are accepted by a group (carrying authority and an aura of truth or a special fascination). The boundary runs between (symbolic) tales presenting a message which is to be intuited with the imagination, and which rouses cultural sentiments without being perceived as 'mere arbitrary'; and discursive speech, which offers propositions (orders, wishes and so forth) and arguments. It is by mobilising sentiments around specific culturally charged symbols, images or tales, a specific kind of fascination, instead of coolly reporting, describing the world, that the 'symbolic process' functions.

In creating symbols we subconsciously create magnetic fields, charged with meaning and value, which are grasped by a community (small or large), images which draw us towards their magnetic centre, evoking sentiments, that is, cultur-

ally orchestrated reactions of different nature, a feeling of what is 'honourable' or, on the contrary, abnormal, either abhorrence at what is shocking or laughter at the absurd, a scale ranging from sacred to sacrilegious, through honourable and dishonourable to natural and unnatural. These implicit boundaries of the normal, 'natural' and honourable are essentially affective in nature, and they may be created not by arguing, but by presentations which respect these boundaries or transgress them, by images evoking the ideal world, but more effectively by images which invert that world, either in a revolting or in a ridiculous manner.¹⁸⁷ These shared sentiments of consent or of revolt or derision, shared with a community are at the core of symbolic phenomena.

There is another aspect to this issue. It seems that the criticism of myth was not a phase in the development of Greek culture. When, as Veyne observes,¹⁸⁸ the Greeks did not stop, century after century, purifying their myths, this may mean that criticism was essential to the dynamics of mythical story telling. Traditional tales were to be summoned in highly varying performances and they had to embody a great variety of modes and moods. As Yunis, Mikalson and others have pointed out, the gods of cult differed markedly from the gods of tragic drama.¹⁸⁹ No doubt the workings of tragedy demanded tales with violent disturbing actions, just as the workings of other genres operated in other keys. Isokrates refers to 'the heinous acts performed in other(!) cities (ἐν ταῖς ἄλλαις πόλεσι), murder of brothers and fathers and guest-friends, slaughtering of mothers and incestuous relationships resulting in children begotten with mothers, the devouring of children contrived by their closest kin, cases of exposure, drowning, blinding and a host of similar atrocities, of which there is never any lack in the traditional yearly theatre performances' (Isoc. *Panath.* 121). The evocation of moods and motives is due to the fact that symbolic phenomena do not exclusively map the world in categories and conceptual schemata.¹⁹⁰ They stimulate cultural sentiments in order to provoke, rouse laughter, or fulfill various cultural needs, in short, create specific kinds of fascination, which are essential to their meaning and which we are to incorporate into our analysis.

It is evident that tales which have once filled a role as 'culture-creating (symbolic) tale' may be told in new ages and environments. In order to account for the passage of specific (traditional) tales from the social use ('Anwendung') in one

187 For the way ambiguous ('either or') or ambivalent ('both') images may generate energy and the feeling of dynamic potency, see Green 1997.

188 Veyne 1983:13.

189 See references above.

190 Vernant 1990:25f. '... ce rôle de miroir renvoyant au groupe humain sa propre image, lui permettant de se saisir dans sa dépendance à l'égard du sacré, de se définir face aux Immortels ...' (emphasis added).

community to another, which does not share the meaning/value systems of the former group, we have to remind ourselves of the fact that the symbolic quality is not anything inherent in the tale, but arises from the interaction between the community's cultural ordering and valorisation and the elements of the tale. While the same material is carried on in a new group or an altered age, the affective and cultural meanings have disappeared with the old audience, leaving a different effect upon the new one. In order to grasp this transference of the tale's substance to a new context with loss of cultural meaning, I would propose to apply the distinction between 'hot' and 'cold' 'myths.'

Addressing once more the problem signalled by Calame, 'il n'y a pas d'essence ni du mythe, ni de la mythologie,' we may attempt at defining, if not 'myth,' at least something we could agree upon to call 'symbolic tale.' The every-day term 'myth' which we arbitrarily, intuitively, *a priori*, apply to the corpus of stories that we for some centuries have agreed upon calling so, is of course a charged term. It conveys the misleading connotation of 'untruth,' quite to the contrary of what 'symbolic tales' amount to among 'natives.'

Still, there were other paths to explore. I have suggested that the broader category of 'symbolic phenomena' includes narratives, which we may call 'symbolic tales,' by a definition that is operational in that it comprises narratives, allusions and images. What I would propose then is to identify and define these tales, not from their semantic or structural aspects, nor from their narrative nature, nor their genre properties,¹⁹¹ but from their ability to create culture. Since culture is basically something ingrained in our senses and feelings,¹⁹² these tales will mobilise our cultural imagination and sensibility, evoking images and feelings of what is natural and normal, honourable, right, desirable, understandable and their contraries: unnatural and abnormal, shameful, wrong, abhorrent, and absurd. These sentiments are necessarily tied to concrete entities, imaginable situations, spatial dimensions, which in addition demand continually to be renewed.¹⁹³ Avoiding terms as (mythical) 'thinking,' 'messages,' 'language' and cognate expressions,¹⁹⁴ we should devise a scholarly terminology which conveys the connotations I have suggested, the imaginative and evocative aspects of the 'symbolic.' Expressions as

191 Calame 1988:9 '... pas plus que sur les éléments sémantiques susceptibles de définir un mythe, sur la forme littéraire qui pourrait le désigner l'accord n'a pas pu se faire.'

192 Geertz 1975.

193 Cf. 'habitus', Bourdieu 1977; 'habit-memory', Connerton 1989. See also Bouvrie 1995.

194 Keesing 1991:376f. draws attention to the difference between symbolists and cognitivists, in that the latter view their activity as scientific whereas the former are interpretive, the cognitive approach studying 'the pool of common-sense knowledge, and understandings of the community and encoded in its language.' However, when focusing on language, what cognitivism gains in scientificity, it loses in understanding the imaginary and affective qualities of culture.

'evocative' are useful since it conveys both the idea of images and of sentiments, and the same is true for 'symbol,' although the term has been appropriated and unacceptably narrowed down in Freudian vocabulary. A corollary of the approach suggested is that we cannot discard the concrete text/image, in Reuben Brower's words, 'there are no myths, only versions ... only texts for interpretation, whether the text is written or oral, a piece of behavior ... a drawing or painting ...'¹⁹⁵ The same plot, I assume, can be put to contrary effect through the sentiments it seeks to rouse in different versions. A study of their cultural meaning has to take into account the prescribed sentiments of the performance.

We may then develop our definition:

A 'symbolic tale' presents

— 'summarizing' or 'elaborating' expressions,

which *imply* the 'truth' instead of stating it or arguing for it, providing

— 'explanations' which are *pseudo-explanations* because fundamental premisses may be suppressed and their missing masqued, in short,

— a tale which aims at *achieving effect* instead of presenting an explicit proposition, not because some power instance is manipulating the unaware, but because these non-rational workings are inherent in the process of culture. In fact both powerful and powerless may be unaware of what is going on, exchanging a tale that has an altogether other effect than the message it professes to deliver.

A 'symbolic tale' is

— a tale, which is enveloped in an *aura of factuality*, accepted by a group, attracting a group to a magnetic centre and *mobilising towards some core values* (summarising symbols) or sorting out conceptual experience and *construing conceptions of the world, charging them with value* (elaborating symbols).

— 'Symbolic tales' arise not from the lack of ways of thinking alternatively, but because this is the only way of creating unfalsifiable truth, that is, having an effect upon the audience, *effecting subconscious conceptions and motivations* (sentiments of identity, cultural boundaries, honour, shame, duties etc.).

— 'Symbolic tales' are nothing less than verbal magic, created by the dominance of the *right hemisphere processes*, our imaginative, emotional, ordering faculty, non-verbal in principle and based on similarity and contrast, as opposed to the non-emotional linear/temporal/causal dimensions of the left hemisphere or secondary processes.

¹⁹⁵ Brower 1971:155.

If 'symbolic tales' are verbal artefacts, they are fed with this imaginative, condensating, evocative force, and if, on the surface they pretend to offer an account of time and place, or cause, this is only the surface, the concrete, imaginary tale, while underneath cultural values are at stake. This surface is presented, not because people cannot reflect rationally, but in order to discourage reflection, because this might induce people to doubt or to reject the 'truth.' 'Symbolic tales' cannot therefore be identified with the bare pattern of plot, abstracted from its surface tale with all its emotional effects. Masking the arbitrariness of cultural systems of a particular power system, they may create indisputable truths, as opposed to truths that are arrived at through discussion and argument. Symbolism handles the unarguable, just as we cannot argue for 'what is the true language' or 'what is the true way of living.' Language and culture are beyond the true/false dichotomy and out of reach from empirical verification.

Symbolism structures everyday experience, but just as there are 'special occasions,' celebrations, which are set apart from the everyday business of instrumental activity, there are 'special tales,' separated from rational discursive speech, engaging, stimulating, mobilising towards a collective focus. They partake in the indispensable 'social work' in the process of creating new communities and maintaining them, as well as in demolishing old ones.

'Symbolic tales' are disguised as tales with a linear movement, and causal reasoning, behind which there may be hidden an essential structure of (affective cultural) meaning. They move the attention away from this meaning, towards the linear story, the chains of cause and effect, the development of drama. This structure is created by other means than conscious reasoning (the left hemisphere and secondary processes, working through linear thinking, with its temporal/causal links). While discursive tales explicitly state their argument, symbolic, intuitive-creative or primary processes dissimulating the issue or pretending some argument, work through similarity and contrast. The symbolic truth is more easily driven home by contrast, when normality is violated and the implied truths are challenged, either in a horrifying (*e.g.* tragic) or in hilarious (comic) challenge. By rousing these reactions the tale confirms the very cultural boundaries in the sentiments of the audience, which are being violated in the tale.

The meaning then of a 'symbolic tale' is its *effect*. 'Symbolic tales' are indispensable to social life, they prove the unprovable, and order individual experience and action, or they transform individuals into groups mobilising them towards a common magnetic center. The same can be said of collective, culturally shared and exchanged, imagery. And in analysing these phenomena we have once more to be aware of the fact that symbolic phenomena are not simply representing reality, offering a picture, an experience of the world. They may challenge the normal world order of the group, creating disorder and provoking their cultural sentiments and

thereby revitalising that world. The example of the Greek manipulation of the 'the Amazons' illustrates this. Wherever they appear these anti-women provoke the culturally shaped image of the normal woman, no doubt in order to recreate it. Other tales may launch a new world subverting the established 'truths.'

We may then discuss how we should develop further methods for studying the 'symbolic' elements in Ancient culture taking account of the propositions made in this paper and refining the definition of the phenomena with which we are dealing.

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Focusing on the invisible. Greek myth and symbol contemplation

Herbert Hoffmann

THE SYMBOL process, being the conceiving and visualizing of symbols, is familiar to artists and mystics alike.¹ The reason for this is simple. Symbols, and symbols alone—from the Greek *symbollein*, to ‘bring together,’ ‘to unite’²—are capable of linking the material and the immaterial worlds. In this paper an archaeologist has set himself the task of examining how symbols work both from a theoretical and from an experiential viewpoint, employing a Greek vase painting as the nucleus of his investigation. In this manner he hopes to be able to arrive at a valid account of how symbolic images (such as those on Greek vases) may have been operative in human consciousness formation.³

Surely my speaking of symbolism subjectively in this manner will shock no-one today, for we have long moved away from the mechanistic world-view of Descartes and Newton—the reign of the purported objective—and have entered a new era in scholarship which acknowledges the role of the subject in the outcome of any scientific investigation.⁴ Depth, most of us will agree, must be interpreted, and all interpretation is bound to be subjective.⁵

The new direction taken by scholarship⁶ postulates the essential unity of the subject and the object. In doing so, it reformulates in contemporary terms what was quite self-evident to pre-Socratic philosophers two and a half thousand years ago: that mind cannot possibly be separated from matter, for the observer and the

1 Stella Lubsen-Admiraal, Dieter Metzler and Mark Mortford kindly read my manuscript and each contributed valuable suggestions for its improvement.

2 Literally to ‘throw together.’ See *LSJ s.v.*

3 The experiential approach to symbolism presented in this paper was prompted by Ken Wilber’s far-reaching idea of a ‘four quadrant’ analysis. See Wilber 1996. Wilber refers to the interior and exterior individual (the individual as subject and object), and the interior-collective (cultural) and the exterior-collective (social). The important thing to note is that none of these four aspects can be reduced to another, and a complete explanation needs to take them all into account. As he puts it, ‘surfaces can be seen, depth must be interpreted.’ Wilber’s ‘four-quadrant’ scheme should appeal to anyone trying to formulate a (posterior to) post-modern theory of myth and symbol.

observed in fact constitute a single interacting whole. It reintroduces the Greek notion of Kosmos (comprising the biosphere, the noosphere and the theosphere) and postulates that the parts must always be seen as aspects of an indivisible totality.⁷ In this perspective, myth and 'truth' become complementary aspects: 'the same tale seen from the outside and the inside.'⁸ The theory that I shall be proposing views myths and symbols from the outside and from the inside as well.

A symbol, as stated at the outset, is a linkage—a throwing together⁹—of the tangible outside and the intangible within. As the poet Rainer Maria Rilke puts it, it is within us alone that the constant transformation of the visible into the invisible is taking place.¹⁰ Myths and symbols in this sense may be considered as instruments which stimulate and catalyze the ongoing process of consciousness formation. This is why in the world's various spiritual traditions, from shamanism and the Hopi Vision Quest to Tibetan tantrism, the Kabbalah and Christian mysticism, myths and symbols inevitably play a central role.

The same can be said for a number of modern psychological approaches, foremost the analytical psychology of C.G. Jung.¹¹ Jung can be credited with being the first Westerner to discover the existence of transpersonal archetypes.¹² The archetypes, as Jung defined them, are basic collectively inherited images or forms that are a part of us. Symbols that have been stamped into our psyche. Jung taught his patients how to work with archetypal symbols, employing the imagination.¹³ He was aware that certain kinds of symbolic images, when invoked, are capable of restructuring the mindset. In Jungian therapy a patient recalls a particularly vivid

- 4 On the various recent critical challenges to Cartesian mechanistic science and its interpretation, often referred to collectively as the 'new paradigm,' see Bohm 1955, Pribram 1971, Prigogine 1980, Grof 1984, Damasio 1995. 'New paradigm' thinking calls for a participatory view of consciousness—the idea that subject and object must be considered together. Einstein was the first to realize that scientific phenomena cannot by their very nature be objective, since the nervous system of the observer oscillates with the same velocity as that of the object he is observing (any changes taking place as the result of their interaction).
- 5 See Damasio 1995. Antonio Damasio, a philosopher and neurologist, has recently created somewhat of a furor by demonstrating that all objectivity is *de facto* bound to be subjective owing to the very structure of the brain.
- 6 See note 4.
- 7 'Things taken together are whole and not whole' (Herakleitos fr. 10 DK).
- 8 Des Bouvrie, this publication p. 17.
- 9 Note 2.
- 10 'We are the bees of the invisible. Frantically we gather in the honey of the visible, to store it in the great golden hive of the invisible,' Rilke wrote his Polish translator Hulewicz. See Cohn 1989:16.
- 11 On the instrumental role of Freud now des Bouvrie this publication p. 53ff.
- 12 For Jung's concept of archetypal symbolism see Jung 1959. For a lucid discussion of the Jungian archetypes see Schlegel 1973:vol. 4, 112-185.

symbol encountered in a dream, and in the course of subsequent days or weeks produces semi-conscious variations until resolution is achieved.¹⁴ The role of the therapist in such dreamwork—entering the patient's myth and symbol-generating system—is in some ways analogous to that of the traditional shaman.¹⁵

Here is another example of the intentional use of symbols for the purpose of consciousness transformation. In Tuscany, near Mount Amiata, resides the Tibetan Dzogchen-master Norbu Rimpoche. Like the practitioners of other spiritual traditions,¹⁶ the Rimpoche makes wide use of symbols in his teaching,¹⁷ especially of symbolic objects, but also of symbolic stories, parables, and riddles.¹⁸

In particular, Norbu Rimpoche likes to employ ritual paintings on silk, known as *thangkas*,¹⁹ for teaching purposes. The *thangka* he uses most frequently represents Mandarava, the female manifestation of the psychic energy of the universe. In a ceremony called *chöd*, a purification ritual, an offering of clarified butter and incense is made to her with the awareness that the one who offers, that which is offered, and the one to whom it is offered are not separate but in essence one and the same. Sounding the sharp and cutting syllable '*phat!*' repeatedly, the lama and his students cut through dualism in order to reestablish primordial Oneness. The ringing of a bell during this ceremony, and the burning of incense, are also symbolic. The sound and the vapors bridge worlds and penetrate to the inner recesses of the psyche. *Chöd* means 'to cut,'²⁰ and by opening and relaxing the senses, these various symbols and symbolic acts assist the mind in returning to its original natural condition of openness and relaxation, which in Dzogchen is coequal with the enlightened state.

13 Jung 1958:212 (with ref. to earlier works). Since Jung, the technique of Active Imagination, traceable to his brief flirtation with Tibetan spirituality, has been developed and refined by René Desoille with his '*rêve éveillé*,' as well as by Hanscarl Leuner with his Guided Affective Imagery. Cf. also Shorr 1974. On Jung's dream psychology see esp. Jacobi 1973.

14 It is in dreams in particular that we generate symbols and create myths. The Lele of Malekula, a Melanesian society studied by John Layard, employ dream specialists to dream the island's collective myths, which are continuously modified to accommodate the changing situation. See Layard 1942. A similar fusion of dream, myth and mundane reality is found also among Australian aborigines. See Leach 1976:41.

15 Stepanova 1998 is the first account of shamanism known to me authored by a shaman(ess).

16 For example the Kabbala. See Scholem 1960:159ff.

17 See Shane 1986.

18 Norbu 1996:63.

19 See Anderson 1980. Note in this connection the similar use still made of Byzantine ikons, including the precise (now printed) instructions for their employment in contemplative visualization.

20 Herakleitos fr. 58 DK also uses the example of cutting to illustrate the essential unity of opposites. See Kirk, Raven and Schofield 1983:189.

What archetypal therapists and Dzogchen-masters have in common is that both employ symbols as tools of their vocation, which can be called ‘consciousness-transformation work.’ Symbols enable us to focus on the invisible. They permit the invisible to be accessed, dormant intuition to be mobilized, and consciousness to be integrated and transformed. In the Dzogchen teaching, therefore, symbols are tools of enlightenment.

Now, the English word ‘enlightenment’ has two quite different—indeed contrary—connotations. Most people associate it with the ‘triumph of rationalism’ commonly ascribed to French philosophers in the late eighteenth century.²¹ But the same word also refers to the metaphysical state of realization, toward which, as Dante puts it at the end of *The Divine Comedy*, ‘all creation moves.’²² It is, I think, highly significant, and reflecting two fundamentally divergent outlooks or ‘Weltanschauungen,’ that the German language distinguishes between two differing connotations of ‘to enlighten,’ whereas English does not. The German verb *aufklären* means ‘to explain,’ ‘to bring in *reason*’; whereas the verb *erleuchten* is used for the latter sense of ‘enlighten,’ as meaning ‘to bring in *light*.’ The eighteenth-century philosophical movement is consequently called ‘*Die Aufklärung*’ in German, whereas ultimate realization is ‘*Erleuchtung*.’ The latter connotation—literally bringing in light where there was darkness—refers us directly to the process of spiritual awakening.

‘Where there is light, all is revealed.’ Thus John I, 5.²³ The Evangelist is seen to employ the symbolism of light in a discourse on spiritual transformation. The association he draws is ubiquitous to both the dual and the non-dual religious traditions, and the main reason this should be so seems to me to have to do with the fact that light contains the entire spectrum of colors. It is this miracle which makes light symbolic also of primordial unity.²⁴ It explains why light is often called the most central mystery of all, and it may also explain why divinities of light, such as the Egyptian Ra, the Greek Apollo, or the Roman Sol Invictus—powerful symbols in themselves—are central in virtually all ancient religions.²⁵ Their light is an inner phenomenon.

21 Which in effect reduced the inside to the outside, the subject to the object, the I to the it, and remapped the entire Kosmos in rationalist and materialist terms (Wilber 1996 being culpable for the jesuitical formulation). A similar counter-cultural understanding of the French Enlightenment is held by William Blake, who in his painting ‘*Newton*’ of 1795 situates the great scientist at the bottom of the sea: ‘immersed in the dark and dense medium of water, traditional esoteric symbol of the material world,’ Raine 1996:87, fig. 61.

22 Watts 1984:14.

23 John says of light (*phos*, contracted for *phaos*): ‘The darkness comprehended it not.’

24 This understanding survived into the Middle Ages. It is spelled out most clearly in the Abbot Suger’s famous treatise: *Libellus de consecratione ecclesiae St. Dionysii* (1144). In the Tibetan tradition primordial unity is symbolized by the rainbow.

The light John refers to is of course the *inner* light, for he is speaking as a seer. Significantly, the Greek word for seer is *hierophantes*, from *hieros*, 'sacred' and *phaos*, 'light', as well as from *phantazo*, 'make visible.' Seers are able to see things invisible to ordinary mortals in much the same way as shamans. The explorer Rasmussen quotes an Eskimo shaman as saying, 'Every real shaman has to feel *quamaneq*, a light within the body, inside his head or brain, something that gleams like fire, that enables him to see in the dark, and with closed eyes see into things which are hidden, and also into the future.'²⁶ What I am suggesting, and shall go on to develop, is that the experience of inner light is not exclusive to Nordic shamans; it was surely commonplace to Greek seers as well.²⁷

A Greek myth illustrates this point most clearly. It is the myth of Glaukos and Polyeidios in the tomb, recounted by Hyginus²⁸ and depicted on the cup by Sotades in the British Museum (Figures 1-4).²⁹ Because the connection of the myth with seeing and enlightenment has not been perceived before, I shall go on to analyse the myth and its visual representation from this perspective and then explain the method by which I arrived at my interpretation.

A first clue is given by the names of both characters, written on the cup in painted name-inscriptions. Both have to do with light and inner seeing: Glaukos refers to gleaming eyes and owl-like wisdom,³⁰ Polyeidios to 'multi-seeing' as well as 'multi-knowing.'³¹

According to the myth as it is told by Hyginus, Glaukos, the young son of king Minos, has disappeared, and various seers are consulted on how to find him. The Kouretes—ecstatic warriors of the Cretan secret society credited with divinatory

25 Christian saints, like Buddhist *arhats*, are represented with halos, also called nimbus or aureolas. These symbols of light emanating from the heads of begloried human beings represent 'light in darkness' inasmuch as they refer to their owners' powers of illumination. The rays emanating from the heads of Greek and Roman solar divinities are likewise in every sense 'symbols of transformation.'

26 Rasmussen 1922.

27 It has been suggested that some Greek seers may on occasion have shamanized. Thus Guthrie 1962:11-13 (of Parmenides); Hoffmann 1997:111. As Mark Mortford observes, the 'rationalism' generally ascribed to Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes—contemporaries of Pythagoras and the Orphics—may have less to do with empiric observation than with their qualities of inner, visionary, seeing.

28 *Fab.* 136. See also Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.96ff.; 3.17ff.

29 D5. Beazley, *ARV.* 763.3 ('Sotades Painter'); Robertson 1992:187f. (and fig. 197); Hoffmann 1997:A3, 120-127, figs. 66-7, 70.

30 *Glaukopis*, as Athena. Glaukos is associated with the owl by Hyginus (*Fab.* 49). The owl's reputation for wisdom derives from its capacity for seeing through darkness, referring to its power of heightened intuition ('in-sight').

31 The two etymologies of *eidein* both refer to seeing as illumination and therefore really mean one and the same.

powers³²—tell Minos that a miraculous calf has been born in his herd. It changes its colours every few hours from white to red to black and back again (the first symbol). The man who best describes the calf, they tell the king, will bring his son back to him alive. The seer Polyeidios appears on the scene and solves the Kouretes' riddle by comparing the calf to a ripening blackberry, which is first white then red then black (the second symbol). He is put in charge of the search. By means of divination Polyeidios soon finds the boy, who has fallen into a *pithos* of honey³³ and drowned.

But that is only the beginning of the story, for at this point Minos reminds Polyeidios of the Kouretes' prophesy that his son will be restored to him *alive*, not dead. He consequently has the seer shut up in a tomb with Glaukos' corpse. Polyeidios soon sees a snake enter the tomb, kills it with a stone, and observes a second snake arrive bearing a magic herb with which it revives the first snake. (The reader by this time will have realized that the entire myth is symbolic, and that the pictures simply visualize the story in abbreviated form.) Killing the second snake as well, Polyeidios uses the serpent's herb to resuscitate Glaukos and restores the revived boy to his father. Now comes the clue for our comprehensive interpretation: Minos refuses to let Polyeidios go until he has taught his son the art of divination. Glaukos is, in other words, to be initiated as a seer.

So let us see of what the myth is symbolic, and how it can be related to the pictures on the cup. The myth of Glaukos' death, the discovery and burial of his body, his revival and return to the living clearly represent initiation.³⁴ Glaukos is the prototypical neophyte. His myth, with his drowning in the honey jar, proceeds according to the classical Hertzian pattern of the double funeral,³⁵ and the imagery reflects this structure. The first interment does away with the putrefying aspect of the corpse by embalming it in honey. The second funeral—the entombment—introduces Polyeidios, who transforms a burial into an initiation. Like the ripening of the blackberry referred to in the myth, rites of passage always proceed in three stages: separation—seclusion—reincorporation,³⁶ but there are some obvious discrepancies between the myth as told by Hyginus and the scene represented on the drinking cup. On the cup Polyeidios obviously has not yet obtained the *poa* which will revive Glaukos, who therefore should be dead. Yet he is depicted as being very much alive. How can we explain this contradiction?

32 Burkert 1985:261f. The Kouretes, an initiatory secret society of ecstatic warriors, annually celebrated the mystery of the death of Zeus, who in Crete was a divinity of the dying and returning type in many aspects similar to Dionysos.

33 On the significance of honey in Cretan rebirth symbolism see Dürr 1984:378f. (with further literature).

34 The fact that the setting of the myth is Crete, and that the Kouretes prophesy the resurrection of Glaukos can likewise be understood as referring to mystery initiation.

35 Hertz 1909, 1960.

36 Van Gennep 1908, 1960.

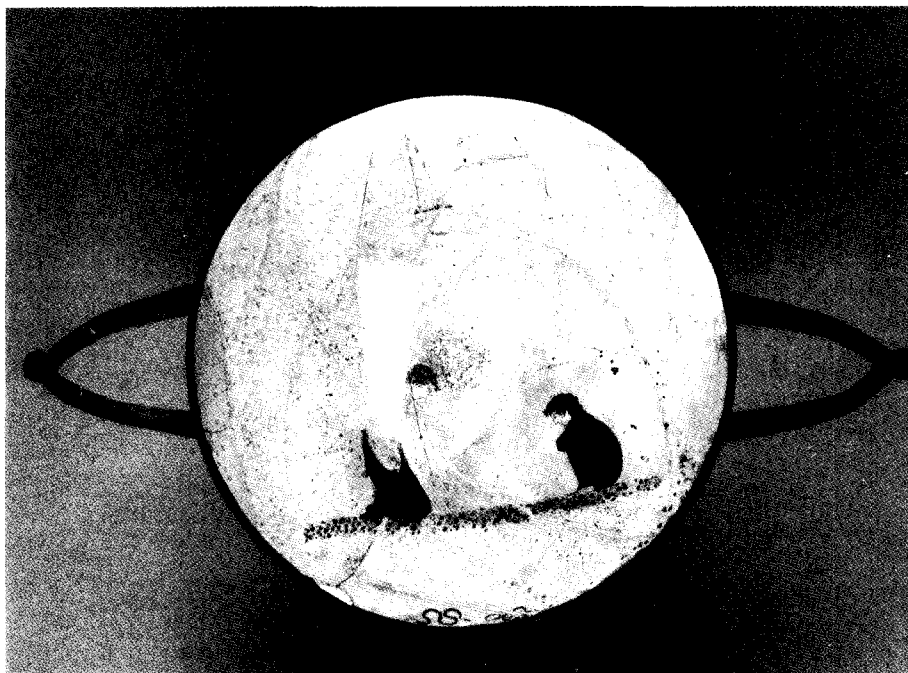
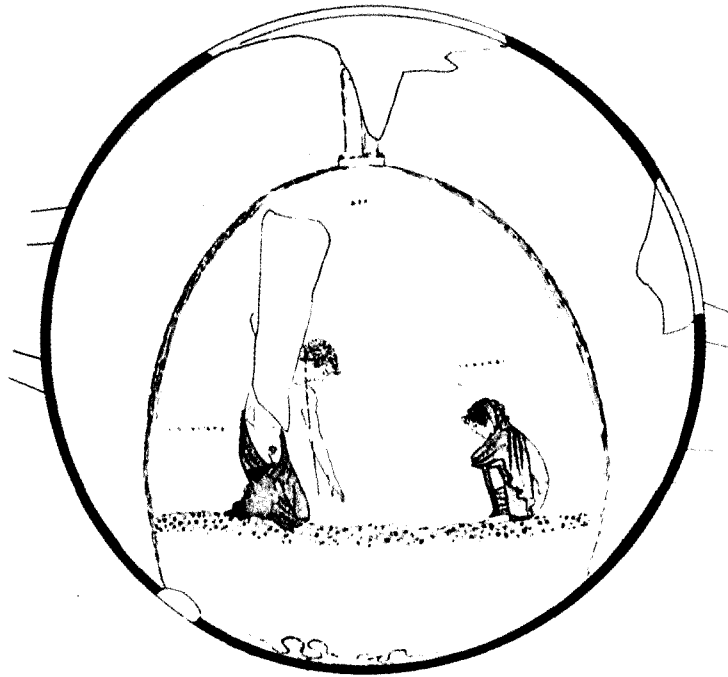


Fig. 1: Glaukos and Polyeidon in the tomb. Interior of an Attic white-ground cup in the British Museum

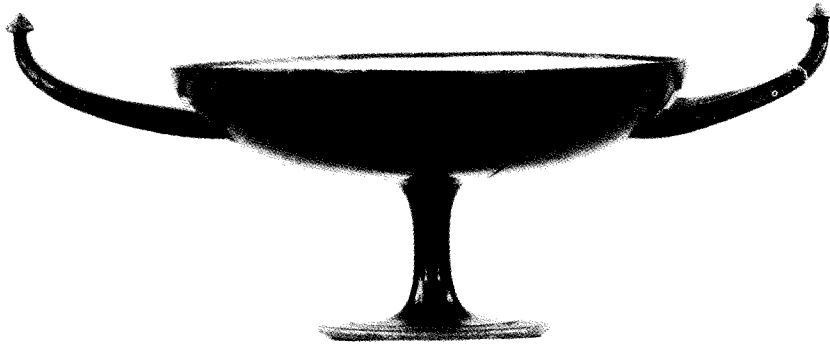


Fig. 1: Glaukos and Polyeyidos in the tomb. Interior of an Attic white-ground cup in the British Museum

Part of the answer is that the middle phase of the tripartite initiation—namely seclusion³⁷—has been selected by the vase painter as corresponding to the middle phase of the Greek funeral rite, the nine days of mourning during which the psyche is supposed to remain in the tomb. Now, a neophyte is universally treated as though he were dead or invisible. He is said to be in ‘another place’ or ‘another world’ and likened to a small child by various symbolic means, on the cup by Glaukos’ squatting posture. The more intellectually developed a person, the less fitted he is to understand himself. The child, like the primitive man and the illiterate peasant, is much nearer to true vision.³⁸ Glaukos is thus being characterized symbolically as initiatory raw material.

With this as background, let us look again at the two protagonists. The special vision of Polyeidios, who transforms death into initiation, is, as said, announced by his name, which is generic for ‘seer.’³⁹ As *seer*, Polyeidios ‘sees,’ or knows, in three different time-dimensions: the past, the present and the future.⁴⁰ In the myth, his intimate knowledge of inner connections⁴¹ is also characteristically manifested by his ability to solve riddles.

We have already said that Glaukos’ name likewise has to do with seeing. It is cognate with *glaukōpis*, and refers to his gleaming eyes. With them he too symbolically ‘sees in the dark,’ like the *glaux*, or owl, with which he is associated by Hyginus.⁴² Thus, both Glaukos and Polyeidios are depicted on the cup as being able to see in the dark tomb! This hints at a deeper level of meaning—a non-chronological, timeless, or dream dimension—reminding us that in the myth itself Minos insists that Glaukos be initiated as a *seer*. Now, seeing in this sense means heightened intuition,⁴³ inner light, clairvoyance, precognition. Shamans and seers cultivate these abilities, as do Tibetan sages.⁴⁴

37 Van Gennep 1960:90-115. Touareg dervishes practice a mystery initiation called ‘Blue Death’ in which the neophyte, after a period of fasting and other spiritual preparation, is secluded for three days and nights in a cavern deep under the ground, from which he emerges ‘reborn.’ I owe this information to Jabrane E. Sebnath.

38 This is why great teachers, such as Christ, have always proclaimed that the neophyte must become ‘as a child’ before he can be reborn into the realm of Truth.

39 Also *ierophanteis*, from *phaino* = ‘bring to light’.

40 See Hawking 1988.

41 *Opsis ton adelon ta phaiomena* says Anaxagoras (fr. 21a DK): ‘The phenomena are only the visible aspects of what is hidden beneath.’ (author’s translation).

42 *Fab.* 49.

43 Heightened intuition here means total awareness, a phenomenon different from that which enables some animals to see in the dark. See note 30.

44 See David-Neel 1971.

Indeed, with Glaukos things become more interesting still, for as we have said he is the son of Minos. His father and his uncle Rhadamanthys—here too a name referring to prophesy or oracular intuition, ‘seeing’—rule over the dead in Hades, a function they share with Dionysos in his chthonic aspect.⁴⁵ Glaukos’ covered head—a detail vital to the full understanding of the scene—is yet another symbol that can be understood in several ways. It refers us overtly to the middle stage of passage rites, the gesture being one of ritual seclusion or mourning. At another level the same gesture can be understood to mean that he is in the ‘other’, or timeless reality of a mystery initiation. As for the tripod prominently displayed on his tomb—a further symbol—the cauldron it would have supported was thought of as offering access to the world of spirit, making it both a chthonic and a divinatory symbol in one. The puberty initiation depicted on the cup can thus be read at three levels simultaneously: as standing for a puberty initiation, a funeral, and a mystery initiation.

At first glance we are surprised that the focal point of the composition should be in the cup’s lower rim, that is to say in the segment with the two snakes. When the cup is held by its two handles and tilted forward, it becomes clear that the snakes are meant to be seen in the same horizontal plane as Polyeydos and Glaukos. Being closest to the viewer, the snakes actually invite *his* participation in the act of witnessing the mysterious proceedings, so that three spectators are now involved in a triangular disposition: Polyeydos, Glaukos, and the viewer, with all three glances riveted on the focal center of the ‘three-dimensional’ composition, the source of ultimate signification.

In the myth, Polyeydos kills a snake and observes that a second snake revives it employing a herb as *pharmakon*. A slain snake and the killing of a snake are thus linked to Glaukos’ revival. The nature of this link needs to be grasped in order to understand the fuller content of the image. Polyeydos is revealing a mystery to Glaukos in the form of temporal synchronicity—timelessness like that which we experience in dreams. His inner vision is being opened,⁴⁶ referred to symbolically by his eyes piercing the darkness of the tomb. He can now see beyond darkness—inner darkness meaning the darkness of ignorance and death. What is being said is that birth and death are not linear phenomena that happen once in a lifetime, but that each of us is dying and being born at every moment. That corresponds astonishingly closely to what quantum mechanics tells us about matter consisting of energized particles constantly disappearing and constantly being ‘reborn.’⁴⁷ Being initiated—a death in life—awakens the capacity of becoming fully aware of this

45 Hom. *Od.* 4. 564, 11. 567ff.; Pind. *Ol.* 2. 75ff.; Pl. *Ap.* 41a.

46 On *autopsia* as mystic vision see Metzler 1972.

47 Capra 1975, Zukav 1979.

mystery, and thus capable of truly (rather than merely intellectually) understanding the nature of change. This is what is proclaimed in the myth by the allegory of the miraculous calf, which after being black, or dead, turns white again.

According to the initiate's expanded understanding, immortality and enlightenment mean the same. Both terms refer to the continuing perception of ontological reality (*ta onta*), devoid of time and concepts. This is the subtle world-space Herakleitos is referring to when he speaks about 'living their death and dying their life.'⁴⁸ This is what Nisargadatta is declaring when he says that the enlightened person—the one who sees and knows—is never 'born' and never 'dies.'⁴⁹ Thus, Glaukos' initiation by Polyeidon into the mystery of inner light can be understood as referring quite literally to his illumination: he is being restored to life as a fully enlightened seer.

So let us go back and see how we arrived at our three-level interpretation. First of all, we considered the symbol polyvalently, as being an open potential yielding meaning at three different levels of signification. The more external or material our outlook, the less likely we are to perceive the inner reality the symbol points to. The level at which we perceive symbols in fact depends entirely on the level of our own consciousness. At the first, or basal, level—taken literally—the Glaukos myth is simply a story. The myth and its visual representation are experienced as something external to us, with no apparent symbolic significance.

At a second level we considered the symbol complex—the picture and each symbolic element it contains—as conjointly standing for something else. At this level, symbols express one by means of the other and therefore function much as signs.⁵⁰ We went beyond our purely literal or descriptive analysis and enabled the subject to move closer to the object. But at this stage our mind, although having just freed the symbol of some restrictions, began imposing others by assigning labels (identifications) on the authority of ancient and modern authors. This in effect is what we are doing each time we cite expert opinion to support our claim that one thing may mean another (*e.g.* seashell = goddess). The symbol, at stage two, remains a piece of secondhand information, to be stored in a recess of memory or a computer file.

At the third level things suddenly became interesting again, for we now moved so close to the symbol that our power of discrimination began to blur. In fact, at this stage we began to have an inkling that we may not be so radically separate from the symbol as our rational (left-hemispheric) brain had previously supposed. The

48 Fr. 62 DK. In fr. 4, employing a pun, he uses the bow as a symbol to express the same mystic precept. Cf. Pépin 1976:96.

49 Nisargadatta 1973, 1989, Balsekar 1982, Dunn 1985.

50 Whereas a symbol can sometimes be a sign, a sign can never be a symbol. See Leach 1976: 9-16.

process of *symbol actualization* had begun! We began to identify with what the symbol symbolizes.⁵¹

In the particular case in point—the Glaukos cup—I was immediately struck by it when I first saw it in its case at the British Museum. Something fascinated me about the myth depicted in its interior. For quite unconscious and subjective reasons, I took up this vase, rather than another, as my object for a deeper investigation. The myth thus became a symbol having a personal resonance.

Seeing myths and symbols at level three is like looking into a mirror reflecting and pointing back to something one has always known to be true. An inner sense has been awakened, providing insight into an interior world which cannot be accessed by the intellect alone. The symbol is working on us, revealing meaning. As William James puts it, in passing out of ordinary consciousness, we are in effect passing from the small to the vast.⁵² At level three, the symbol truly becomes a stepping-stone to the timeless.

So there is half the story: the view from the inside. We interpreted a thing seen on grounds of our subjective experience. We scrutinized Glaukos and Polyeidos from our personal perspective. The other half of our level three analysis takes us to the view from the outside. In other words, what the symbolism of Glaukos and Polyeidos might have signified for a fifth-century Athenian. We have arrived at the ancient cultural context.

Now, we know that both Sophokles and Euripides composed dramas on the Glaukos myth,⁵³ and these will have been performed in Athens within decades of the time the Glaukos cup was painted. The Cretan myth cited by the Athenian playwrights was, however, much older. It seems most likely to me that the tragedians and the vase painters were familiar with it for reason that it was part and parcel of their vast panhellenic system of myths and beliefs.

Levels one and two, which can now be seen to correspond to the rudimentary and possibly clouded levels of our modern comprehension, clearly have no validity for the ancient Athenian viewer, whose perspective would have been entirely from level three. Having commissioned or purchased the object for an impending funeral, he might have considered it an apt expression of faith in personal survival as befitting a funeral dedication. According to a third-level reading, faith in a

51 Stesimbrotos' allegorical, meaning Eleusinian, exegesis of Homer, as well as his concept of *hyponoia* (concealed meaning) are interesting in this context, inasmuch as they suggest a similar fusion. See Pépin 1976:95-105, Metzler 1980:78 and note 24; Lambertson 1986. As Mark Mortford points out to me, Plato's myth of Er and his simile of the cave are relevant, as is the *Meno* with its doctrine of *anamnesis*.

52 James 1958.

53 Only fragments survive: Soph. fr. 358-368 Nauck; Eur. fr. 634-646 Nauck.



Fig. 5: Glaukos-inspired bronze sculpture by the author. Height: 42 cm

Dionysian 'Hereafter' would here be symbolized by a Dionysian banqueting cup replete with rebirth symbolism.

There is, however, another and even more intriguing possibility, this being that both the vase painter and his client were initiates and hence familiar with the *mysteria*⁵⁴ from their own direct experience. Much speaks in favour of this assumption, for how else explain that a vase painter—a *banausos*—should be able to transmit to us in images the deepest content of the mysteries, namely their metaphysical essence? This alternative eventuality requires from us an additional level of interpretation, a fourth level,⁵⁵ less overt than level three. One might almost call it arcane.

Glaukos, the young hero who dies and is resurrected, was worshipped at Knossos as an initiation hero. His shrine has been excavated.⁵⁶ He was venerated there and elsewhere as one of the *chthonioi*, a paradigm for initiatory transformation.⁵⁷ His myth will have been told as an initiatory *aition*, the steps of his initiation being understood as steps to his enlightenment, or full self-knowledge.⁵⁸ In view of Glaukos' family connection with the 'other realm',⁵⁹ it may well have been told (and seen) at Eleusis as well.

A level four interpretation would thus have to consider the eventuality of an Athenian purchaser having employed the Glaukos cup much as Tibetans employ their *thangkas*: as an aid in contemplative visualization. In this way, the myth, understood as being itself a symbol, would have been fully activated in its bridging function, and everything that separated the observer from the symbol would have

54 At Eleusis, initiation (*myesis*) culminated in the autumn festival called *Mysteria*. As Burkert points out, mystery initiation was an optional activity comparable with a pilgrimage to Santiago di Compostela. The mysteries were 'initiation rituals of a voluntary, personal and secret character that aimed at a change of mind through experience of the sacred.' I borrow Burkert's definition, contained in Burkert 1987:11 and note 59.

55 I am grateful to Jens Braarvig and Richard Candida Smith for bringing to my attention the fact that something like my four levels of symbol activation is to be found also in the writings of medieval scholastics, in particular St. Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus. In the scholastic tradition, the four levels are the literal, the allegorical, the moral and the anagogical, the last corresponding to the sensible perception of the invisible and ultimately union with the divine (*hierogamos*). See Braarvig 1987. The four levels are referred to also in Dante's *Letter to the Ca' Grande*. The Buddhist *dhyana* likewise stipulates four levels of symbol contemplation. See Conze 1996 glossary, s.v. 'dhyana'.

56 Callaghan 1978:1-29.

57 Morris 1988:750ff. The seers Trophonios and Amphiaraos are perhaps the best-known of Greek seers who enjoyed similar veneration. *Kl. Pauly* s.v. 'Amphiaraos,' 'Trophonios,' 'Oropos.'

58 For a diverging understanding of Delphic self-knowledge (lacking the consciousness dimension) see Jaeger 1945:i, 284f., Burkert 1985:148; and most recently Pagels 1995:119.

59 See note 45. In the myth, it will be recalled, it is Minos who insists on Glaukos' esoteric initiation. On the Eleusinian connection see also Callaghan 1978.

dissolved. More correctly, the symbol itself would have dissolved, so that what it symbolized flowed uninterrupted through the observer. His personal vision would give way to a broader vision in which the parts and the whole were seen together as being many and one simultaneously. This new vision would have been entirely beyond his rational comprehension. Rather than thinking, it is as though a detached watching or observing were taking place. This is the level of deepest symbol contemplation. It is from this level that Tibetan lamas contemplate the *devas* and *dakinis*⁶⁰ painted on their *thangkas* (and, for that matter, Orthodox monks their icons⁶¹). The experience of total freedom and detachment that accompanies stage four, the ultimate stage, is traditionally referred to as a death or dying. But the death that is meant is the death of thought and time,⁶² rather than of the body. It is a state, or mode of being, in which death itself becomes symbolic.

The conclusion to be drawn is that the initiation depicted on the Glaukos cup is to be understood in a metaphysical sense, as pertaining to immortality and enlightenment, the two terms being synonymous with self-knowledge at a higher level of comprehension. Contemplation here becomes prominent as the traditional method in which myths and symbols are most powerfully employed.⁶³

Enlightened immortality has little to do with the popular phantasy of post-mortem survival in a pleasant or unpleasant 'Hereafter.' It refers to the Socratic and pre-Socratic awareness of existence as unbroken flow.⁶⁴ It means that you cannot step twice into the same river, for everything moves on and nothing abides.⁶⁵ A splendid statement of this profound insight is given by Pindar in his dirge in memory of an Athenian who had been initiated at Eleusis:

'Blessed is he who has seen these things
Before he goes beneath the hollow earth
For he *sees* the end of mortal life
For he *sees* the god-given beginning.'⁶⁶

60 Fairy-like celestial beings.

61 See note 19.

62 On time as thought see Krishnamurti and Bohm 1988.

63 The best way to test the validity of this statement is to take up the contemplative practice oneself.

64 See Grof 1984, Braarvig 1987, Krishnamurti and Bohm 1988. The ancient awareness of timeless present, or immortal time, can still be found in a number of pre-industrial societies such as the Himba of Namibia, on which see Crandall 1998:esp. 108f. Cf. also Victor Turner's related concept of 'flow,' as in Turner 1978:254.

65 On Herakleitos' celebrated 'river-statement' see esp. Guthrie 1962:1, 488-92. But cf. also Kirk, Raven and Schofield 1983:194-47.

66 Fr. 137a Sandys. For analogous formulations cf. Soph. fr. 753 Nauck and *Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 480 Evelyn-White.

This passage is interpreted by Fritz Graf⁶⁷—absolutely correctly I am convinced—as meaning that initiation is the true death and in this sense the beginning of real life. It suggests that the vision of inner light, familiar to both the Eastern and the Western mystic tradition,⁶⁸ will have been for many the culminating experience at Eleusis.⁶⁹

67 Graf 1974:80.

68 Known in the latter as *visio beatifica*.

69 The central mystical experience is referred to in terms of light in most traditions. Since initiation into the Mystery brings insight, a more enlightened state as compared with the relative darkness of ignorance before, this is aptly symbolized by light. At Eleusis, the Great Light appears to have been experienced in the form of an overwhelming vision. See Kerényi 1967:95ff., Metzler 1972:116f.

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Illustrations

- Figs. 1-4. London, British Museum D 5. Courtesy of the Trustees,
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- Fig. 5. Photo U. Corleis

Genealogy as a form of mythic discourse. The case of the Phaeacians

Jaakko Aronen

1. Introduction

IN THIS PAPER I am going to discuss the Phaeacians (Φαίακες / Φαίηκες) as a mythic collective typologically comparable to many other peoples in Greek mythology such as, for instance, the Amazons, the Centaurs, the Ethiopians, or the Hyperboreans. My approach is mythological, which means that I consider the Phaeacians—Homer is our main source—as belonging entirely in the realm of myth. Consequently, I am not interested in details where the Homeric account may reflect the so-called ‘real’ conditions of Mycenaean and Dark age societies. Let me just mention for example that the description of the founding of the Phaeacian city at a place called Scheria undoubtedly suggests the foundation pattern of a colonial settlement or that, on the other hand, the pattern of government contains some features taken from real life (although it seems that as such it is a construction that could not have been in use anywhere in any historical time).

Still another restriction has to be made: in the rich Homeric narrative I am going to focus on *one single* aspect, namely the association of the Phaeacians with two other mythic groups, the Cyclopes and the Giants. But I hope to be able to show that this aspect significantly contributes to an overall characterisation of the Phaeacians themselves.

Actually, in the scholarly literature the Phaeacians have received relatively little attention outside purely literary analyses of the *Odyssey*. In these treatments the emphasis is placed on Odysseus’ stay among this people which is seen only in relation to the adventures of Odysseus and to the theme and structure of the *Odyssey*. I am not going to question the legitimacy of these kinds of approaches. Suffice it to note that in this way the Phaeacians themselves remain in the background and do not receive a treatment of its own right. I think that—after the entry by Samson Eitrem in the *Real-Encyclopädie* (1937)—until now the most remarkable contribu-

tions to a study of the Phaeacians in a larger framework of Greek mythology are a couple of pages which Pierre Vidal-Naquet has dedicated to the subject in his *Le chasseur noir* (1983) and two articles by Charles Segal: 'The Phaeacians and Odysseus' return' (1962) and 'Divine justice in the *Odyssey*. Poseidon, Cyclops, and Helios' (1992); both of these are now republished with some revisions in Segal's book entitled *Singers, heroes, and gods in the Odyssey* (1994).

Let us first take a look at the relevant passages in the *Odyssey*. Here some information is provided as regards the past and ancestry of the Phaeacians.

They had been brought to their actual land, Scheria, only one generation before the events narrated in the poem. The migration had taken place under the guidance of Nausithous, father of the present ruler Alcinous. The original site of the Phaeacians had been a place called Hypereia near the land of the ruthless Cyclopes, and the reason for the new settlement was in fact that they had been plundered by their stronger neighbours.

οἱ πρὶν μὲν ποτε ναῖον ἐν εὐρυχόρῳ Ὑπερείῃ,
 ἀγχοῦ Κυκλώπων, ἀνδρῶν ὑπερηνορεόντων,
 οἳ σφεας σινέσκοντο, βίηφι δὲ φέρτεροι ἦσαν.
 ἔνθεν ἀναστήσας ἄγε Ναυσίθοος θεοειδής,
 εἶσεν δὲ Σχερίη ... (Hom. *Od.* 6.4-8)

Formerly they lived in the spacious land Hypereia,
 near to the overbearing Cyclopes
 who had kept harrying them, being greater in strenght.
 From there godlike Nausithous led the people off
 and settled them in Scheria ...

In another context a further glimpse at the Phaeacian history is given. Now we learn that the above-mentioned Nausithous was the son of the god Poseidon and Periboia who, for her part, was the daughter of Eurymedon, king of the insolent Giants. On Eurymedon it is commented that he had brought to ruin both the reckless people of the Giants and himself. Nausithous had two sons Rhexenor and Alcinous. The former died soon after having been married leaving behind no male offspring but only a daughter, Arete,¹ who later on became the wife of her uncle, Alcinous.

Ναυσίθοον μὲν πρῶτα Ποσειδάων ἐνοσίχθων
 γείνατο καὶ Περίβοια, γυναικῶν εἶδος ἀρίστη,
 ὀπλοτάτη θυγάτηρ μεγαλήτορος Εὐρυμέδοντος,
 ὅς ποθ' ὑπερεθύμοισι Γιγάντεσσιν βασιλεύεν.
 ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ὤλεσε λαὸν ἀτάσθαλον, ὤλετο δ' αὐτός,

1 For Arete's status, see recently Whittaker 1999.

τῇ δὲ Ποσειδάων ἐμίγη, καὶ ἐγένετο παῖδα
 Νηυσίθοον μεγάθυμον, ὃς ἐν Φαίηξιν ἀνασσεῖ·
 Νηυσίθοος δ' ἔτεκεν Ῥηξήνορά τ' Ἀλκίνοόν τε.
 τὸν μὲν ἄκουρον ἐόντα βάλ' ἀργυρότοξος Ἀπόλλων
 νυμφίον ἐν μεγάρῳ, μίαν οἶην παῖδα λίποντα
 Ἀρήτην· τὴν δ' Ἀλκίνοος ποιήσατ' ἄκοιτιν. (Hom. *Od.* 7.56-66)

First Poseidon, the earth-shaker,
 and the most beautiful Periboia had a son Nausithous.
 She (Periboia) was the youngest daughter of great-hearted
 Eurymedon, who in his time had been the king of the overbearing
 Giants. He led his reckless people into its ruin and perished himself.
 But Poseidon lay with her (Periboia) and she produced a son,
 the great-hearted Nausithous who ruled over the Phaeacians.
 Nausithous had two sons Rhexenor and Alcinous.
 Apollo of the silver bow shot down the former
 married but yet without any son in his hall; he left only a daughter,
 Arete, and Alcinous made her his wife.

To complete the survey of the Homeric passages, a third instance must be recalled, namely, the words of Alcinous when he states that the Phaeacians are 'as close to the gods as the Cyclopes and the wild tribes of the Giants.'

... ἐπεὶ σφισιν (*sc.* to the gods) ἐγγύθεν εἰμέν,
 ὡς περ Κύκλωπές τε καὶ ἄγρια φύλα Γιγάντων (Hom. *Od.* 7.205-6)

These are the bare facts furnished by the *Odyssey*. In the present essay I propose to discuss these scattered pieces of information and try to view them within the larger framework of Greek mythology, not only within the οἰκονομία of the Homeric epic. The basic problem is of course what is the sense of the association of precisely these two mythic collectives,² the Cyclopes and the Giants—usually seen in Greek culture in a negative light and pointedly characterised in the above passages also by the Homeric narrator as wild, violent and presumptuous³—with the Phaeacians who are generally interpreted as a friendly people living a peaceful and highly civilised life in their remote paradise. The Phaeacian episode has actually been called 'the first surviving Utopia in European literature.'⁴ Here by 'utopia' is evidently meant a description of an imaginary place connotated by positive at-

2 On the concept of 'mythic collective', cf. Brelich 1958:325-51.

3 Cf. 6.5 Κυκλώπων, ἀνδρῶν ὑπερηνορέοντων, 7.59 ὑπερθύμοισι Γιγάντεσσιν, 7.60 λαὸν ἀτάσθαλον, 7.206 ἄγρια φύλα Γιγάντων. We shall return to these characterisations below.

4 Ferguson 1975:14 (followed, e.g., by Bichler 1995:33-39 and Hennig 1997:515).

tributes, 'ideal,' 'prosperous,' 'perfect,' and so forth. The Cyclopes and the Giants seem to be in a diametrical opposition to the Phaeacian mode of existence.

In addition, it is worthwhile noticing that in the second passage quoted above (*Od.* 7.56-66) it is question of a genealogical presentation: Periboia, a giant princess, lay with Poseidon and bore Nausithous who was Alcinous' father and Arete's grandfather. This establishes a kinship between the Giants and the Phaeacians and includes in the ancestry of the latter also the god Poseidon. In fact, in Book 13 of the *Odyssey* we have the *ipsissima verba* of Poseidon (v. 130), where he declares himself as the progenitor of all the Phaeacians: 'Φαίηκες, τοί πέρ τοι ἐμῆς ἔξ εἰσι γενέθλης' 'the Phaeacians who are born of my own offspring.' Evidently for this reason the agora of the Phaeacian city was built up around the fine shrine of the god (*Od.* 6.266 ἐνθα δέ τέ σφ' ἀγορή, καλὸν Ποσειδῆϊον ἀμφίς 'there is a beautiful sanctuary of Poseidon in the middle of the agora').⁵

Elsewhere in the poem we learn that Poseidon was also the father of the Cyclopes. At *Od.* 9.519 Polyphemus ascertains to be Poseidon's son: 'τοῦ (sc. of Poseidon) γὰρ ἐγὼ πάϊς εἰμί, πατήρ δ' ἐμὸς εὐχεται εἶναι' 'I am your son and you claim to be my father.'⁶ At *Od.* 1.71-73 it is told that the mother had been the nymph Thoosa, daughter of the mythic sea-god, Phorcys: Θόωσα δέ μιν (sc. Πολύφημον) τέκε νύμφη, / Φόρκυνοσ θυγάτηρ, ἀλὸς ἀτρυγέτοιο μέδοντοσ, / ἐν σπέσσι γλαφυροῖσι Ποσειδάωνι μιγεῖσα 'The nymph Thoosa bore him, daughter of Phorcys, lord of the barren sea, after having made love with him in vaulted caves'.⁷

Judging from the text of the *Odyssey* it is not completely clear whether all the Cyclopes were the sons of Poseidon, or just Polyphemus.⁸ It may be more likely to consider them all Poseidon's offspring if we remember that in the above quoted *Od.* 7.61-62 only the Phaeacian king Nausithous had been mentioned as the god's son, but in fact we heard from the mouth of Poseidon himself that he was the ancestor of the whole nation. Obviously in mythical thought these kinds of distinc-

5 Note that whereas in Homer Poseidon's son and Alcinous' father is named Nausithous, other traditions mention between Poseidon and Alcinous the eponym Phaiax (Hellanic. *FGrH* 4 F 77, Diod. Sic. 4.72.3-4, schol. *Od.* 5.35, cf. Conon *FGrH* 26 F 1.III). Nausithous and Phaiax appear together as steersman and officer in Theseus' expedition to Crete (Philochorus [4th - 3rd cent. BC] *FGrH* 328 F 111 in Plut. *Thes.* 17.6). Plutarch adds that Theseus built a heroon for both of them at Phaleron. Nearby there was probably also a sanctuary of Poseidon (Calame 1990:351). What is important here is the association of these two names, their connection with seafaring and their heroic cult somehow connected with the cult of Poseidon. This enables us to catch a glimpse of *cultic* traditions concerning the Phaeacians and of what may lie (also chronologically) outside the Homeric narration. Was there a myth of Nausithous and Phaiax as 'culture heroes' introducing seafaring? Philochorus mentions that these two men were chosen because the Athenians had not practised navigation before: μηδέπω τότε τῶν Ἀθηναίων προσεχόντων τῇ θαλάσση. On heroes as founders of aspects of actual reality, see Brelich 1958.

6 Cf. also *Od.* 9.412 and 529.

tions were not so essential and the ancestry of an individualised member stood for the ancestry of the collective.

In this way through Poseidon, the common ancestor, a bloodline relation can be established also between the Phaeacians and the Cyclopes. Using scattered Homeric passages we have thus been able to detect a 'family connection' of the Phaeacians with two other mythic peoples, the Cyclopes and the Giants, and, on the other hand, with the god Poseidon (related also to the Cyclopes).

2. *On premises and methods*

Before attempting to resolve the problem presented above all by the apparently paradoxical relation of the Phaeacians to the Cyclopes and the Giants, I find it necessary to discuss briefly two methodological preliminaries essential for a correct assessment of the present issue. The first of these concerns the decoding of mythological texts. The second is constituted by considerations on genealogy as a form of mythic narrative in archaic Greece.

The passages examined above show that in the actual Homeric context the mentions that link together the three mythic collectives are brief, scattered and have an air of incidentality. They may also seem somewhat superfluous in that they have no relevance to the plot of the epic and someone may indeed wonder if they do fit at all the overall characterisation of the Phaeacians in the *Odyssey*. However, if we understand the preserved Homeric text as an act of narration which presupposes mythic material that existed in pre-Homeric and extra-Homeric traditions as well, the picture changes in some important respects.

There are several opinions on the impact of tradition and innovation on the subject-matter of the Homeric epics. This is not the place to enter into a review of the various theories. I personally agree with those who stress rather the character of the epics as traditional oral poetry shaped over several generations of performers expressing collective values and beliefs.

The basic fact is, then, that myths narrated in the Homeric poems were traditional and it is dangerous to categorise them or parts of them simply as 'inventions

7 An additional observation: Polyphemus' mother was *Thoosa* and one of the Phaeacians bore the name *Thoon* (*Od.* 8.113). A coincidence, a 'Homeric *ad hoc* invention' or a piece of authentic mythical conceptions that contributes to the conceptual link between the Phaeacians and the Cyclopes? At *Il.* 18.40 *Thoe* appears in a catalogue of the Nereids among other names suggesting various aspects of the sea. The names *Thoon*, *Thoosa*, *Thoe* were obviously strongly associated with the marine sphere and, on the other hand, recalled the adjective *thoos* 'swift' used in epic diction as a formulaic epithet for a ship. The latter association, of course, lies behind the name *Nausithous*. These kinds of names clearly lead us to the world of Poseidon.

8 In Euripides (*Cycl.* 20) the paternity of Poseidon is explicitly extended to all the Cyclopes. Note also the Corinthian cult (at Isthmia) of the Cyclopes in a precinct adjacent to the temple of Poseidon (Paus. 2.2.1).

of the poet.⁹ Of course the mythic substance of the narratives was to a varying degree modified and recreated with the innumerable acts of retelling (*e.g.* in view of the needs of the performer and the audience) but this is actually only one of the basic characteristics in the transmission of myths in general. What we have are different narrations and different variants—to be sure: often only fragments and allusions to these narrations and variants—which, however, make sense in their specific narrative context. The myth itself transcends its every reproduction.¹⁰ This is also why it is not very meaningful to search for an ‘original’ form of a given myth (we cannot even suppose that there had been any).

Although I prefer to analyse the Homeric poems in terms of Greek (oral) *myth-telling* rather than in terms of Greek *literature*, I do not of course deny their complex and (sometimes highly refined) ‘artistic’ nature or their tendency to an internal coherence.¹¹

In the mythological analysis of the Homeric epics multiple aspects have to be taken into consideration, among them the diachrony (different chronological layers and elements of different origin in the preserved narration)¹² and the synchrony (how does the narrated form of the myth make sense in its actual context), not to speak of the possibility that the specifically *Homeric* type of myth-telling probably tends to alter inherited mythic patterns for instance mitigating them (humanising gods and heroes, omitting excessive violence, some monstrous elements, *etc.*).¹³

Especially important for the present theme is the principle—pointedly emphasised, among many scholars, for instance by two great mythologists Angelo Brelich and Jean-Pierre Vernant—that mythology forms a network of interrelated narratives.¹⁴ On the level of deciphering an individual myth this means that every single detail (every person, every action, sometimes even every word) in a mythic narrative is significant since it alludes to numerous other accounts in the mythological system. In short, individual myths are incomprehensible if not read intertextually.

9 In this sense see also the remarks in Nagy 1996:113-46 against considering Homeric mythological references as a matter of *ad hoc* personal inventions by the poet. And this is the formulation of Sourvinou-Inwood 1995:9: ‘a poet’s selections are not purely ‘personal’, divorced from collective assumptions, a notion in any case difficult to sustain in the case of the Homeric epics, shaped as they were by parameters determined by collective beliefs and attitudes.’

10 *Cf.*, *e.g.*, Burkert 1979:3, Graf 1987:2, Skaife Jensen 1990:31, Nagy 1996:113-46.

11 Orality does not mean lack of artistry or unity (see Nagy 1979:3-5, Pucci 1987:27-28, Nagy 1996:27-27, Thomas 1992:29-51).

12 This does not mean the ‘analytic’ deconstruction of the material or the search for the origins but rather helps to find out for instance re-elaborations of more ancient motifs and to explain eventual inconsistencies.

13 *Cf.*, *e.g.*, Griffin 1977, Duchemin 1980:854 and *passim*, Brelich 1985:68, Wathelet 1983, Mondini 1990:158.

On this basis, since mythic discourses appear far from being haphazard accumulations of disparate elements, we are able to suppose that the mentioning of the Cyclopes and the Giants in connection with the Phaeacians is somehow meaningful in its narrative context. These short instances obviously made sense alluding to extra-Homeric mythic traditions in theory known to the contemporary Greeks¹⁵ but which escape later interpreters (not only the modern ones but the ancient scholiasts as well). In the minds of the performer and his audience the Cyclopes and the Giants presumably evoked a series of mythic associations with the underlying symbolic and ideological notions.

Accordingly, in order to grasp at least something of the meaning of these associations one ought to study the Cyclopes and the Giants in relation to the whole mythological system and thereafter to attempt to find out their *raison d'être* in the myth of the Phaeacians.

After this premise I shall now turn to discuss the other issue that I proposed above: genealogy as a form of mythic discourse. In the Homeric passages it was question of a genealogical presentation and, as argued above, we can postulate the pertinence of the relationship 'Phaeacians - Cyclopes - Giants' by the assumption that in a mythic narrative every detail is significant. Can we now go further and say that through the common kinship the Phaeacians share some qualities with the two other peoples to whom they are genealogically related?

This is a grounded phrasing of a problem if one considers the very function of genealogies in the characterisations of gods and other mythic entities. Genealogies are an age-old way of defining persons in mythic (and historical) narratives. This is true in a spectrum of civilisations that extends from China and Japan to the ancient Near Eastern and Greek cultures, and further to the contemporary ethnologically documented ones.¹⁶

14 Cf. Brelich 1972:371, 418, 480, 525, 1977:22-26, Vernant 1980:132, 235-38. Cf. also, e.g., Leach 1982:5, Segal 1986:49-52, Bremmer 1987b:6, Dowden 1992:8. More or less independently there lays in the background the influence of some lévi-straussian ethnographic readings of mythology, however never applied to the body of Greek mythic material (cf., e.g., Lévi-Strauss 1973:152-6, 301-3). Cf. also Vernant 1980:233-40.

15 Cf. Brelich 1969:121: 'I poemi omerici rivelano, mediante rapide allusioni, di conoscere (e supporre presso il loro pubblico la conoscenza di) tradizioni che non hanno motivo o occasione di raccontare.' Slatkin 1991:15 speaks of a displacement in Homer of various mythical traditions 'into more or less oblique references.' Cf. also Dowden 1996:51-53. Accounts on the Cyclopes as part of archaic myth-telling are of course evidenced by the very *Odyssey*, but there were pre- and extra-Homeric traditions as well (e.g. Hesiod, for these questions, cf. below). From the 5th century BC poet Xenophanes (*Fr.* 1.21 W = B 1.21 DK) can be inferred that telling myths about the Giants was a customary practice notwithstanding the absence of Giant myths in Homer.

16 China and Japan: West:1985:22-24, Goldman 1987:505. Near East: West 1966:1-3, 1985:11-17, Wilson 1977. Contemporary world: Henige 1974, Goldman 1987:502-4, Davis 1989, Tonkin 1992:110-1.

In Greece we may recall the production of theogonical myths structured around lineages of gods and mythic entities, of which Hesiod's *Theogony* is of course the most influential. To Hesiod was also attributed the fragmentarily preserved *Catalogue of Women*, a hexameter poem listing ancestries of mythic women. In other kinds of myths as well stress is regularly laid on the person's ancestry.¹⁷ The Homeric epics offer many instances where genealogies are introduced in connection with the appearance of a new hero¹⁸ and in the Theban cycle the genealogical core is still more evident. Even objects can have their 'genealogy' in that the listing of their previous owners charges the present heir with a special significance.¹⁹ It is also to be remembered that the earliest Greek prose compositions from the 6th and 5th centuries BC were principally mythic and semi-mythic genealogies (Hecataeus, Acusilaus, Pherecydes of Athens, Hellanicus of Lesbos).²⁰

In substance, the function of these divine and heroic genealogies was to define the person in question, to explain what he/she is. In this way they contributed to order temporality, organise the cosmic system and express present realities by implying definite relations between various entities. The capacity of a genealogy to qualify is essential in Greek mythology; it helps to evaluate mythic persons and their actions in the adequate perspective.²¹

To sum up: in Greek myth-telling genealogy is a deeply rooted narrative form. The genealogical relationship was as a rule an important element in determining the type and identity of a person, and we have no reason to think that the Phaeacians constituted an exception.

Now it is time to justify the above assumptions by taking a closer look at the Phaeacians' relatives and, subsequently, try to find out a possible reason for the association of these mythic peoples.

17 On Greek theogonies and genealogies, *cf.*, *e.g.*, Philippon 1936, Jacoby 1949:134-40, West 1966:12-16, 1985:1-11, Tölle 1967, Broadbent 1968, Schwabl 1969:174-84, Moreau 1986:1-15, Bianchi 1987, Calame 1987, Graf 1987:60-75, Henrichs 1987:248-54, Ricciardelli Apicella 1993, Lang 1994, Jacob 1994:169-202, Malkin 1994:17-22, 98-106, Hall 1997:67-107.

18 To take but one example among many: the dialogue of Glaucus and Diomedes at *Il.* 6.119-236. Here it is exactly the pedigree of the former (six generations) that is essential for the understanding of the passage, *cf.* Gaisser 1969, Piccaluga 1980, Fornaro 1992, Scodel 1992, Harries 1993, Avery 1994, Alden 1996.

19 Two examples: Agamemnon's sceptre at *Il.* 2.101-8 and Odysseus' bow at *Od.* 21.11-41 (see Clay 1983:78-96).

20 For these prose writers' working methods (in certain aspects different from those of oral poetry) in dealing with genealogical material, see Jacob 1994.

21 Some considerations in this sense in Philippon 1936:3-4, Costa 1968:91-100, Brelich 1977:25-26, Goldman 1987, Dowden 1992:10-12.

3. *The Cyclopes*

The Cyclopes are one of the most familiar entities in Greek mythology, and a good deal has been written about them even recently.²² Homeric studies have usually (and rightly, I think) seen the Cyclopean society and the Cyclopean manner of life such as they are described in the *Odyssey* as intentional opposite to the civilised world represented by Odysseus.

In addition, some critics have compared the land of the Cyclopes to that of the Phaeacians and drawn similar conclusions seeing in the tension between the two peoples a polar opposition that structures the epic.²³ I agree that this line of interpretation is justified for many reasons. But, on the other hand, I feel that emphasising only the differences between these two worlds miss the mark in some crucial respects.

We know from what was said at the very beginning of this paper that originally the Phaeacians and the Cyclopes had been neighbours, and, in addition, that Poseidon was involved in the lineage of both peoples. On this basis it may be useful to bring together some aspects of the Cyclopean mythology in order to in the final chapter relate it more closely to that of the Phaeacians.

The description of the Cyclopes in Book 9 of the *Odyssey* (notably vv. 105-29) is unusually rich, turning out to be a real ethnographic treatment. Let us begin with those aspects which seem to be in contrast to the ordinary world and even more so to the Phaeacian world. The Cyclopes live in uncivilised conditions: they make their homes in the caves of the mountains,²⁴ they do not know agriculture nor seafaring, they lived without common laws, they were presumptuous and

22 A selection of treatments since the seventies (presenting quite a variety of perspectives): Kirk 1970:162-70, Glenn 1971, Calame 1986, Detienne and Vernant 1978:52-76, Burkert 1979:30-34, Austin 1983, Bergren 1983:45-50, Clay 1983:112-32, Mondi 1983, Calame 1986:52-74, Vidal-Naquet 1983:50-52, López Férez 1988, Sihvola 1989:34-36, Skafte Jensen 1990:38-39, Konstan 1990, Goldhill 1991:31-34, Privitera 1993, Pucci 1993, Cook 1995:93-110, Brown 1996.

23 The comparison between the Homeric Cyclopes (nature, impiety, inhospitality) and Phaeacians (culture, piety, hospitality) has been sometimes made, mostly, however, not from the mythological point of view but rather from that of literary technique and with regard to the thematic unity of the whole poem (for various interpretations, *cf.*, for instance, Rose 1969:392-3, Kilb 1973:87-90, Austin 1975:153-4 ['At the opposite end of the spectrum from the Kyklopes are the Phaiakians. With them the symmetrical balance, the aesthetics of contrast ... come into full flower'], Clay 1983:125-32, Mondi 1983:26-29, Thalmann 1984:1, Sihvola 1989:36, Webber 1989:11, Pucci 1993:27-29, 37-39, Garvie 1994:25). That the Phaeacians could be somehow *similar* to the Cyclopes has not been argued (an exception: Redfield 1983:241-2).

24 Living in caves was considered a pre-cultural and subhuman feature. Men lived 'formerly in caves in the mountains like beasts' states the *Homeric Hymn to Hephaestus* (3-4). Until Prometheus brought culture men lived 'in sunless recesses of caves' (Aesch. *Prom.* 453). *Cf.* Clay 1980:115, Buxton 1994:105-8. In mythology the mountains were 'outside and wild,' and 'before' as humanity's first place of habitation (Buxton 1994:88,90).

violent. Their outward appearance was monstrous, they were of immense size and the very name κύκλωψ points to a physical defect or abnormality.²⁵

Polyphemus, the only individualised Cyclops, breaks the rules of guest-friendship so extremely important for the Greek culture and for the behavioural code in the *Odyssey* to the effect that his treatment of Odysseus and his men appears a 'bizarre caricature of hospitality.'²⁶ The dietary code of Polyphemus is also alien to the Greek custom: he eats raw human flesh, drinks unmixed wine and unmixed milk.²⁷ In fact, he did not resemble ordinary 'bread-eating' human beings (9.190f. οὐδὲ ἐώκει / ἀνδρὶ γε σιτόφαγῳ). Furthermore, Polyphemus boasts on his savage nature (9.494 ἄγριον ἄνδρα) and reveals an arrogant disdain for the divine order stating that the Cyclopes pay no regard to Zeus and the Olympian gods since they are stronger (9.275-6 οὐ γὰρ Κύκλωπες Διὸς αἰγιόχου ἀλέγουσιν / οὐδε θεῶν μακάρων, ἐπεὶ ἧ πολὺ φέρτεροί εἰμεν).

What is curious in the Homeric description is that to all this savagery and hubris are connected also idyllic features that recall descriptions of Golden Age or Elysium. We are told that because of the rain sent to them by Zeus their fertile soil produces wheat, barley and grape crops. And all this without cultivation (9.108-11). It is quite peculiar that Zeus is here mentioned as the provider of the necessary rain if we remember the above quoted boast by Polyphemus. In the view of the same boast it may also seem somewhat paradoxical that at 9.107 the Cyclopes are said to put their trust in the immortals (οἳ ῥα θεοῖσι πεποιθότες ἀθανάτοισιν). These (at least apparent) inconsistencies will be commented on further below.

In the Hesiodic treatment of the Cyclopes in the *Theogony*²⁸ there is a statement on their presumptuous character (139 ὑπέρβιον ἦτορ ἔχοντας) but the brighter side of the Cyclopes is dominant. They are skilful craftsmen and they provide Zeus with the thunderbolts he needs to defeat the hostile Titans. In Hesiod—and we shall return to this point later—their father is not Poseidon as in Homer but they are sons of Ouranos and Gaia. In still other mythic traditions they are attributed the construction of the walls of Argos, Tiryns and Mycenae.²⁹

Is there any sense or coherence in the mythological presentation of the Cyclopes if these various mentions are taken into consideration? I think that all this

25 The word may be interpreted as 'one-eyed' (pace Mondi 1983 who does not see in the name any connection with the 'eye'). The *Odyssey* nowhere explicitly mentions that the Cyclopes have just one eye. A reference to a single round and frontally-located eye is found in Hesiod (*Theog.* 143-5). Another possibility is of course to translate 'Cyclopes' simply as 'Round Eyes' or 'Round Faces.'

26 Quotation from Brown 1996:15.

27 When the Greeks drunk milk they mixed it with honey, see Privitera 1993:29.

28 *Theog.* 139-46, 501-6.

29 Cf. esp. schol. Eur. *Or.* 965. Other sources in Eitrem 1922:2329-30.

information is not at all incongruous but points to the same direction. The ambiguity,³⁰ the co-existence of negative and positive features, becomes understandable if we consider the mythic time when the Cyclopes were active. In Homer their setting are the pre-cultural chronologically and geographically remote conditions. In Hesiod they help Zeus to slay the Titans and establish the actual universe, acting thus *before* its establishment. Their father Ouranos (in Hesiod, for the Homeric father Poseidon, see the following section) is also himself a highly ambiguous entity that irreversibly belongs to the world before Zeus' rule. In the traditions about the wall-building the Cyclopes help to construct the present world acting as a kind of culture heroes in the earlier preparatory phase before the accomplishment of the final physiognomy of Greece.

In sum, these mythic traditions assign the Cyclopes to the world before the actual order of the universe, to the phase when the world was still primordial and undifferentiated. Consequently also the Cyclopes were primordial and undifferentiated and characterised by a constellation of ambiguous features.³¹ Their mode of being would be unthinkable in the present world-order. In fact there are traditions of them being slain by the god Apollon in punishment for the death of Asclepius;³² Pindar suggests that Zeus himself had killed them.³³

So taken as a whole we get the following picture. The Cyclopes are ruthless and violent, still, on the other hand, their society is not lacking some Golden Age features which point to a carefree life. They showed a contemptuous attitude toward the gods, but still manifested some kind of piety. This kind of life, full of ambiguities, is restricted to the primordial uncivilised conditions of mankind and, according to one tradition, the Cyclopes were even killed and in this way totally excluded from the actual cosmos. Especially important for the present argument is the theme of the co-existence of uncivilised violent features combined with the idyllic and 'constructive' ones, and the final destruction of the Cyclopean community.

4. *Intermezzo: Poseidon, the common ancestor*

After having discussed the Cyclopes and before turning to the Giants, a few words must be dedicated to Poseidon, the common ancestor of the Phaeacians and the Cyclopes.

In the Greek pantheon Poseidon is best known as 'the god of the sea' and 'the earth-shaker god.' There has obviously been some oscillation in the insertion of

30 Cf. also Vidal-Naquet 1983:51.

31 On this kind of ambiguity in the typology of the mythical collectives in general, cf. Brelich 1958.

32 Hes. *Fr.* 52, 54 MW, Pherec. *FGrH* 3 F 35a (the sons of the Cyclopes killed by Apollo), Eur. *Alc.* 5-6. Other sources in Eitrem 1922:2333.

33 *Fr.* 266 SM.

this ancient deity into the polytheistic system: Homer makes him Zeus' elder brother, whereas in Hesiod he is younger than Zeus.³⁴ His special ties with the horse are also widely attested.

A closer look at the whole documentation concerning Poseidon reveals that the god is actually not so much associated with order and unity as it may seem, but rather with the 'symbolic world of wild nature.'³⁵ In the historical period Poseidon was considered a marginal and frightening god: he was not associated with civilised life or civic institutions, his sanctuaries were often located outside the city (but among the Phaeacians in the middle of the agora, *cf. Od.* 6.266 quoted above in section 1) and in mythology his children, as we have seen with regard to the Cyclopes, were often brutal monsters.³⁶

We may end with a quotation by Walter Burkert who maintains that even in Homer 'Poseidon remains an embodiment of elemental force; sea storm and earthquake are the most violent forms of energy directly encountered by man, while the horse was the strongest energy which man could then control ... but clarity and illumination does not proceed from it—this must come from Athena or Apollo'³⁷ (and the order, of course, from Zeus). We have, then, a context of wilderness and primordality connected with violence.

5. *The Giants*

What about the Giants?³⁸ The above discourse of primordality and ambiguity is relevant here, too. The Giants, as the Hesiodic Cyclopes, were sons of Ouranos and in this way belong to the primordial phase of the cosmos. In Hesiod they had their origin in the blood of Ouranos which after his castration fell on earth and fertilised Gaia. They are belligerent, strong, and of great stature.³⁹

We saw in section 1 that in Homer, in whom references to the Giants are only few, they were wild and reckless (*Od.* 7.59-60, 206). In another instance Homer distin-

34 *Il.* 15.182, *Theog.* 456-7. A good short survey of the god in Burkert 1985:136-9. For more details, *cf.* Schachermeyr 1950 (not very helpful), Bremmer 1987a, Wright 1996, Maitland 1999.

35 To use the phrasing of Sourvinou-Inwood 1991:233.

36 If we want a somewhat different example we may recall Lamia, the frightful child-killing demon, *cf.* Johnston 1999:180 for the suitability of Poseidon to this genealogy. In fact, Gellius (*NA* 15.21) states: *ferocissimos et immanes et alienos ab omni humanitate Neptuni [sc. of Poseidon] filios dixerunt.*

37 Burkert 1985:139. *Cf.* also Duchemin 1980:870-5 on some passages in the *Iliad* which actually depict Poseidon as a powerful opponent to the order of Zeus, Segal 1994:204 'Homer virtually makes Poseidon one of the deities of primordial creation.'

38 For the Gigantic mythology Vian 1952 is fundamental. *Cf.* also Waser 1918 and Vian and Moore 1988.

39 *Theog.* 50, 185-6.

guishes them sharply from ordinary human beings: οὐκ ἄνδρεσσιν εἰκότες, ἀλλὰ Γίγασιν ‘they do not look like men but like Giants’ (*Od.* 10.120 about the Laestrygians).

The Giants best are known from the Gigantomachy, their revolt against Zeus and the other gods of the present universe. The Olympian gods won and the Giants were killed as punishment. Some sources speak of them as having been buried under various mountains in Greece and Italy.⁴⁰ We note that as the Cyclopes also the Giants were exterminated and excluded from the present world-order.

In Greek mythology, there are two famous descendants of the Giants, Lycaon and Tantalus, in whose destinies the above pattern seems to be repeated. Both act in the mythic time before the constitution of the present cosmos; they are famous for their piety but at the same time for violence and hubris. This ambiguity cannot be part of the actual conditions from which both persons are, in fact, obliterated.⁴¹

It may be that Homer alludes exactly to the battles of the Gigantomachy when he mentions Alcinous’ great grandfather, the giant king Eurymedon, who had destroyed his people and himself.⁴² What also interests as to the character of Eurymedon and his people is the highly negative adjective ἀτάσθαλος used of them in this Homeric passage. In early epic diction this word is regularly associated with acts of hubris,⁴³ and it is clearly against this background that the use is to be explained here.⁴⁴

Instead of referring generically to the Gigantomachy, also another, not necessarily exclusive, interpretation for the presence of Eurymedon in the Homeric text can be formulated. We have fragments of a tradition where a giant called Eurymedon was presented in a highly negative way as a raper of the young Hera whom

40 For these latter sources, *cf.* Vian and Moore 1988:195.

41 These rich mythical narratives are discussed in more detail in Piccaluga 1968 (esp. 187).

42 *Od.* 7.60 ὁ μὲν ὤλεσε λαὸν ἀτάσθαλον, ὤλετο δ’ αὐτός, *cf.* the discussion in section 1 above. According to Hainsworth 1988:324 here ‘the allusion to the Giants’ defeat, if not an *ad hoc* invention, is obscure.’

43 *Cf.* *Il.* 4.409, *Od.* 16.86, Hes. *Op.* 134, *Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 67, *etc.* *Cf.* Nagy 1979:163, Clay 1989:35-38 (36: ‘No English term can convey the full range of this Greek word. ‘Overbearing,’ ‘violent,’ ‘reckless,’ or ‘lawless’ offer only partial translations for this highly charged term.’). It is to be remembered that in the Homeric passages quoted in section 1 the giants were also ὑπέρθυμοι (*Od.* 7.59), a term semantically near to ἀτάσθαλοι, and their tribes are wild: ἄγρια φύλα (*Od.* 7.206). The Cyclops Polyphemus was characterised as ἄγριον ἄνδρα (*Od.* 9.494, *cf.* above). In addition, in the Gigantomachy there was a pair of Giant warriors called Agrios and Thoön (Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.6.2). The latter is a Phaeacian name, too, see n. 7 above.

44 In Hes. Fr. 43a.65 MW Heracles is said to have slain the overbearing Giants. Here we find the third pregnant adjective ὑπερφίαλος which, as ἀτάσθαλος and ὑπέρθυμος, points to the hubristic nature. Also Bacchylides speaks of the hubris that destroyed the Giants (15.63-64) but, as in Homer, no details are provided.

Zeus himself subsequently, after having married Hera, threw into Tartarus.⁴⁵ It is not straightforwardly possible to identify the two homonymous Giants if we bear in mind that the sources we have at our disposal constitute only minute fragments of a rich mythic patrimony, the details of which vary from representation to representation.

But, on the other hand, nothing prevents us from supposing the identity, especially since one can find the same kind of motifs in both traditions. In both myths Eurymedon is a negative figure who, because of his hubristic deeds, meets his death (in the latter case explicitly by the will of Zeus). In addition, the activity of the giant is every time anchored in the world before the establishment of the rule of Zeus from which the Gigantic race was definitely eliminated. If the identification is correct we have been able to verify extra-Homeric myths about Eurymedon to which the Homeric narrator in his context only briefly alludes.

When we analysed the Cyclopes there emerged a pattern of primordial beings, violent, ambiguous and full of hubris. The same pattern applies to the Giants as well. A final comparison between the Cyclopes and Giants reveals that both groups were excluded from the present universe by divine punishment.

6. ... and the Phaeacians

Now it is finally time to turn to the Phaeacians. On the basis of the above considerations I shall put forward the thesis that the Phaeacians too are a highly ambiguous primordial people who represent something that cannot be part of the present world. Until now the scholarship has been practically unanimous in seeing in them a civilised ideal society: they are excellent seafarers, their society is highly organised, they are extremely refined, they respect the laws of hospitality, they are called ἀγχιθεοί 'near to the gods' (*Od.* 5.35, 19.279) and φίλοι ἀθανάτοισιν 'friends of the gods' (*Od.* 6.203). Alcinous' garden flourishes all year around producing all kinds of fruits, his palace is built with precious metals, and so forth. The Phaeacians do not seem to know the significance of toil and labour, dividing their time between feasts and agonistic competitions.⁴⁶ This is how the king Alcinous brings together some aspects of his people's life: 'Dear to us are always banquets, lyre, dances, changes of clothes, warm baths and beds' (*Od.* 8.248-9). Here we are seemingly facing an atmosphere of a Golden Age paradise of blessed life.

However, we have seen that in the Homeric narrative the Phaeacians are associated genealogically and otherwise with the Cyclopes and the Giants, two groups

45 Euphorion (3rd cent. BC) Fr. 99 Powell, schol. *Hom. Il.* 14.296a. There may be also one pictorial representation of Eurymedon (an Attic cantharus with a gigantic figure and the script]MEΔON), see Vian 1988. Cf. also Vian 1952:175-6.

46 Note that, significantly enough, the games did not include the rude ones, wrestling and boxing (especially stated at *Od.* 8.246).

characterised by markedly ambiguous and negative features. This makes us ask if also in the Phaeacians one can detect respective traits. Indeed, a close reading of the myth reveals a lot of strange features in the Phaeacian idyl 'dolce vita.' If the scholarly tradition has sometimes overemphasised the negative side of the Cyclopes, in the Phaeacians it has in turn overemphasised the positive sides. Only a few scholars have called attention to the fact that the Phaeacian civilisation is not an idealised human society but in fact superhuman and overcivilised⁴⁷ and as such extremely alien to the typically Greek concept of the necessity to avoid any excess, crystallised in such catchwords as γνῶθι σεαυτὸν or μηδὲν ἄγαν.

Actually the Phaeacians did not want to be in any contact with ordinary human beings; they had chosen to live far away isolated from the mankind:

οἰκέομεν δ' ἀπάνευθε πολυκλύστῳ ἐνὶ πόντῳ,
ἔσχατοι, οὐδέ τις ἄμμι βροτῶν ἐπιμίσγεται ἄλλος. (Od. 6.204-5)

We live far apart, out in the surging sea
at the world's end. No other mortals come to mingle with us.

This idea is pointedly repeated at *Od.* 6.279 where it is noted that no people can be found nearby and, above all, at *Od.* 6.8 where the land of the Phaeacians is located far away from 'bread-eating' human beings: ἐκάς ἀνδρῶν ἀλφιστάων. Here it seems that a clear-cut distinction is made between ordinary human beings and the Phaeacians. We may be reminded of the fact that the Cyclops Polyphemus did not resemble common 'bread-eating' people either (another practically synonymous adjective is used here): 9.190f. οὐδὲ ἔώκει / ἀνδρὶ γε σιτοφάγῳ.

Furthermore, among the Phaeacians hospitality and friendliness are not granted.⁴⁸ It is stated that they, in fact, do not generally like the strangers, not to speak of hosting them:

οὐ γὰρ ξείνους οἶδε μάλ' ἀνθρώπους ἀνέχονται
οὐδ' ἀγαπαζόμενοι φιλέουσ' ὅς κ' ἄλλοθεν ἔλθῃ. (Od. 7.32-33)

The men here do not bear at all with strangers
and they do not receive friendly those who come from elsewhere.

Many of the Phaeacians are said to be ὑπερφίαλοι 'ruthless', 'insolent,' etc. (*Od.* 6.247), a word of unequivocally negative connotation and which in the *Odyssey* is

47 E.g. Clay 1983:127-8, Carnes 1993.

48 The first to call attention to the unfriendliness of the Phaeacians was Rose 1969. He has met severe criticism (in fact some of his conclusions seem too far-fetched), most vehemently by de Vries 1977. It should be stressed that the Phaeacians are simultaneously friendly and hostile (cf. Carnes 1993:103) and this ambiguity can be explained in relation to the undifferentiated nature of the primordial entities.

used to characterise also the Cyclopes (*Od.* 9.106) and in Hesiod the Giants.⁴⁹ Moreover, at *Od.* 8.166 Odysseus says to Euryalus, the arrogant Phaeacian, ‘ἀτασθάλω ἀνδρὶ ἔοικας’ (‘you look like a ruthless man’) recurring to the same powerful adjective denoting *hubris* that defined the reckless Giants as well.⁵⁰

Thus we can state that ambiguous traits are intermingled in the Phaeacian life: overcivilisation and, on the other hand, a rude ‘Gigantic’ and ‘Cyclopean’ quality. Their life is easy, they are hospital but at the same time they are ἀτάσθαλοι and ὑπερφίαλοι as well. It is important to note that in their treatment of Odysseus they actually exaggerate the rules of *xenia* which the Cyclopes did not have at all.⁵¹ This combination of ambiguous features point to the undifferentiated and primordial world which, as already noticed with regard to the Cyclopes and the Giants, does not belong to the actual universe ruled by Zeus.

Emblematic in this regard are also the extra-Homeric mythic traditions that make the Phaeacians not descendants of Poseidon but of Ouranos: when Ouranos was castrated, the drops of semen that fell to earth begat the Phaeacians. In the *Genealogies* of Acusilaus (*FGrH* 2 F 4) we read: ἐκ τῆς ἐκτομῆς τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ ῥανίδας ἐνεχθῆναι συνέπεσεν, τουτέστι τὰς σταγόνας, κατὰ τῆς γῆς, ἐξ ὧν γεννηθῆναι τοὺς Φαίακας. The same tradition recurs in Alcaeus (Fr. 441 LP reported by schol. Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.992) τοὺς Φαίακας ἔχειν τὸ γένος ἐκ τῶν σταγόνων τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ ‘the Phaeacians are sprung in the drops that fell from Ouranos’ and in the Argonautic myth: αἵματος Οὐρανίου γένος Φαίηκες ἔασι ‘the Phaeacians are sprung from the blood of Ouranos (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.992). These testimonies are notably old—we are far away from late antique erudite lucubrations.

It is noteworthy that, as we have had occasion to note above, a descent from Ouranos recurs also in Cyclopean and in Gigantic mythology; in the latter case even to the detail that they had their origin in the blood of Ouranos.⁵² In fact, the scholiast to Apollonius of Rhodes juxtaposes the tradition concerning the Phaeacians as the descendants of Ouranos to the panhellenised Hesiodic view that they were the Giants to whom Ouranos’ semen gave rise.⁵³ What matters is that the oscillation between these two peoples as ‘true’ descendants of Ouranos is a further proof of an association between them in the Greek mythological system.

49 See above n. 44.

50 See above n. 43.

51 Cf. Vidal-Naquet 1983:67.

52 Hes. *Theog.* 176-86.

53 Schol. Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.992 (p. 302 Wendel); the relevant parts are quoted also in Acusilaus, *FGrH* 2 F 4.

I maintain that one is not anymore justified in referring to the Phaeacians simply in terms of an ideal human society since through their linear relation with the Cyclopes and the Giants their mode of being in important respects is anchored in the irreversible past and not to present day conditions.

If the Cyclopes and the Giants were typically *hubristai*, we saw that this was a Phaeacian feature as well. It should be noted that in an analogous way in which those two other races were sealed off from the real world by divine punishment, also the Phaeacians are destroyed by the orders of Zeus and Poseidon and concealed under a mountain: μέγα δ' ἤμιν /δέ σφιν/ ὄρος πόλει ἀμφικαλύψειν/ ἀμφικαλύψαι/ (*Od.* 8.569, 13.152,158,177).

To explain this matter has been an arduous problem for the relatively few who have paid attention to the significance of these verses. The situation is quite complicated. Poseidon had in the past conceived a threat against Nausithous, the father of Alcinous, that one day, since the Phaeacians do not seem to realise the dangerousness inherent in navigation and continue to be able to escort men over the high seas without hasard, he will conceal the community behind/under a mountain (*Od.* 8.566-9). This prophesy comes true when the ship that had brought Odysseus to Ithaca returns home (*Od.* 13.180-4). The last vision the *Odyssey* provides of the Phaeacians is a scene where they—in order to change their destiny—praying for Poseidon stand about the altar (*Od.* 13.185-7).

It is not clear if with the verb ἀμφικαλύπτω, used in all relevant passages, is meant a total destruction by burying the whole people or just enclosing them beneath the mountains.⁵⁴ For the present argument it is sufficient to remark that in both cases they are definitely eliminated from the present world.

The fact that the Phaeacians are excluded has not been appropriately evaluated. Perhaps it becomes more understandable only now when a comparison has been made to the destinies of the Cyclopes and the Giants.

The reason for the exclusion in the Homeric narrative level was of course motivated by the fact that the Phaeacians helped Odysseus, the object of Poseidon's wrath, to reach his home. In fact, the god discovers to his chagrin that Odysseus returned from the land of the Phaeacians to Ithaca with more gifts that he could ever have taken from Troy (*Od.* 8.135-7). But more generally speaking there may be other and (as to the Greek system of values) more important reasons as well: for instance, the hubristic behaviour in that the Phaeacians were too confident in their easy toilfree existence and in their ability as seafarers. They did not even have to take into consideration possible dangers at sea.⁵⁵ In the present conditions every-

54 For this matter of controversy, cf. the most recent discussions in Friedrich 1989, Peradotto 1990:77-82, Carnes 1993:113, Segal 1994:28-29 (all with references to earlier studies).

day labour and the dangerousness of seafaring are realities that the Greek world must face.

We saw at the beginning that the Giant king Eurymedon had brought to ruin himself and his hubristic people. The same pattern is in fact repeated when his descendant the Phaeacian king Alcinous and his people are concealed under/beneath a mountain and totally excluded from the present world. If, on the other hand, we want to make another kind of comparison, this time between the Cyclopes and the Phaeacians, we may note that in the former the uncivilised and violent features are dominant while the idyllic aspect of life is only hinted at, whereas in the latter the basically same situation is differently posed. In the Phaeacian society the paradisiacal features are more evident⁵⁶ while their 'Cyclopean' or 'Gigantic' nature is less visible, but, still, as I have argued, it is there.

That is why I think the association—however marginal it is in the actual Homeric text—of the Phaeacians with the Cyclopes and the Giants is meaningful. It contributes to define the Phaeacian manner of life and, consequently, to make the audience realise that also the apparently easy Phaeacian life is not desirable and not possible in the present world in exactly the same way as the Cyclopean and the Gigantic life.

If we agree that the ultimate function of mythology is to help to understand the surrounding universe, its history and arrangement, and man's place in it, the above considerations may have shown that the genealogical presentation was one strategy in the conceptual organisation of the cosmos; it contributed to lay the foundations for the present world's conditions and values.

Notwithstanding the sometimes undoubtedly sound criticism against the use of the concept 'myth' (not an indigenous Greek category) by Calame,⁵⁷ I still think that in Greek culture there existed a distinct group of narratives aimed at 'creating culture' *i.e.* laying the foundations for the understanding of present realities, which—in lack of another term—we may conventionally call 'myths.' S. des Bouvrie argues for the term 'symbolic tales.'⁵⁸ I hope to have contributed in this case-

55 *Cf. Od.* 8.556-63 (Alcinous states that the swift ships of the Phaeacians go wherever their masters direct them absolutely safely without the need of steersmen or steering oar). *Cf.* also Eitrem 1937:1521-23, Segal 1994:24.

56 As regards the descriptions of various distant paradisiacal places (Elysium, Golden Age conditions, the garden of the Hesperides, *etc.*) it should be noted that in Greek mentality they do not necessarily imply any attractive settings. Rather they belong outside the present universe (in the past or geographically elsewhere). *Cf.* the remarks in Cook 1995:54-56, 98-99 and in Aronen 1999:64. I am not referring, of course, to the eschatological beliefs of Orphism and mystery doctrines.

57 *Esp.* Calame 1996:9-55, *cf.* also Grottanelli 1997:19-23

58 For details, see her paper 'The definition of myth: symbolic phenomena in ancient culture' (in this volume).

study to the view that these mythical representations are not to be considered 'primitive,' 'irrational,' or 'illogical;' rather they constitute a symbolically charged but nevertheless a very 'rational' way of organising existence and reaffirming cultural identity.⁵⁹

59 For more issues concerning the 'irrationality' or 'rationality' of myth, see now the contributions in Buxton (ed.) 1999.

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Gaia/Gê. Entre mythe, culte et idéologie

Stella Georgoudi

DEPUIS TRÈS longtemps, la figure de la Terre (avec T majuscule), celle que les Grecs appelaient Gaia ou Gê, ne cesse d'attirer l'attention de plusieurs historiens des religions, et même de provoquer une sorte d'engouement pour cette entité considérée, entre autres, comme 'mère de toute chose' (παμμήτρια), comme une puissance 'très ancienne' (πρεσβίστη)—pour reprendre les termes de l'*Hymne Homérique à Gê* (1-2). Mais c'est surtout depuis la publication de l'ouvrage d'Albrecht Dieterich, au titre si parlant,¹ que la 'Terre-Mère' a été promue au rang de divinité universelle des origines, à laquelle tous les peuples auraient rendu un culte, et qui serait source unique de vie et d'énergie pour hommes, animaux, et végétaux.²

Qu'il soit cité, ou qu'il soit passé sous silence, l'ouvrage d'A. Dieterich a incité d'autres spécialistes—et non pas des moindres—à gratifier la Terre d'un statut de 'primauté,' voire de 'prééminence,' par rapport aux autres divinités grecques. Une supériorité bien 'établie,' dira-t-on. Car ce serait de cette Terre-Mère universelle que 'procéderaient,' par une sorte d'émanation, les diverses Athéna, Héra, Aphrodite, mais surtout Déméter et Korè, comme autant de 'rejetons' qui 'pousseraient' de ce 'giron' originel à la manière des plantes.³ De ce point de vue, est très significatif, par exemple, le raisonnement d'un spécialiste de la civilisation mycénienne, tel John Chadwick, qui écrivait: la Déméter et la Persephone des Grecs de l'époque classique 'ont continué, de diverses façons, le culte préhellénique de la Terre-Mère (Earth Mother) Il ne peut exister *aucun doute* que depuis l'Helladique Ancien

1 Dieterich 1925.—Ces réflexions, qui ne se veulent ni absolument affirmatives ni définitives, sont nées d'un réexamen critique—entrepris depuis longtemps—de cette figure 'archétypale,' que nombreux historiens des religions continuent à chérir sous les noms de 'Grande Déesse,' 'Déesse-Mère,' 'Terre-Mère' etc. Dans ce texte, je me limite à esquisser quelques aspects seulement de ce thème 'terrien,' si riche en rebondissements.

2 Le *modus operandi* de Dieterich, pour la construction de cette 'théologie' de la Terre-Mère, a été analysé, voire 'décortiqué,' par Pettersson 1967.

3 Cf. Stengel 1910:26. Selon Cook (1914:396), derrière Déméter et Korè 'looms the venerable form of the earth-mother.'

[c. 2500 av. J.C.], le culte de la Terre-Mère avait dominé la vie religieuse dans le monde égéen; et cela a continué pendant l'époque classique sous des noms divers.⁴

Mais l'attrait qu'exerce sur certains savants cette entité nommée Terre, ne peut être appréhendé que dans le cadre d'un courant de pensée qui cherche, depuis très longtemps, à mettre le temps des origines sous le signe et l'emprise d'une puissance féminine qu'on appelle, de façon souvent interchangeable, 'Grande Déesse,' 'Déesse Mère,' 'Grande Déesse Mère,' 'Terre-Mère.'⁵

Or une des idées directrices sur lesquelles se fonde ce type de 'monothéisme féminin des origines,'⁶ pourrait-on dire, concerne justement l'identification de cette insaisissable 'Grande Déesse Mère' à la Terre elle-même. Certains ne font pas de distinction entre ces deux figures, considérant sans doute que, dès l'époque paléolithique, la 'Grande Déesse,' aux attributions universelles, est déjà la Terre (*cf.* Pettersson 1967:8-9). D'autres, comme, par exemple, Pierre Lévêque, pensent que la 'Déesse Mère,' principe de fécondité des Paléolithiques, devient, avec l'invention de l'agriculture, la 'Terre Mère,' principe de la 'structure désormais indestructible [de la] fécondité/fertilité.'⁷ Et à l'image de celle qui l'avait précédée, cette Terre-Mère aurait également occupé une position de prépotence, elle aurait constitué l'élément dominant parmi les entités divines. Pour les Grecs, dit Guthrie, 'the worship of the earth as the Great Mother was one of the oldest forms of their religion, if not the oldest of all.'⁸

Si je m'attarde sur ces théories, c'est parce qu'elles ont exercé une influence certaine sur la façon dont on considère Gaia/Gê, sur l'importance dont on l'investie, et sur la place qu'on attribue, dans le panthéon grec, à cette 'Mère par excellence.'

Certes—et, sur ce point, qu'il me soit permis de reprendre quelques réflexions de l'article cité précédemment:⁹

'on ne saurait mettre en question le côté maternel de Gê, souvent mis en valeur par des spécialistes de la Grèce ancienne, d'autant plus que ce sont les Grecs eux-mêmes qui en parlent. On ne saurait non plus faire abstraction de la place importante concédée à Gaia, par la *Théogonie* hésiodique, dans l'ordre des générations divines. Mais il serait préférable de sortir des généralités et d'interroger de nouveau et conjointement les données

4 Chadwick 1976:93 (c'est moi qui souligne). Je reviens sur ces aspects dans une étude en cours sur le sacrifice des bêtes pleines.

5 Sur ce courant de pensée qui est beaucoup plus persistant qu'il ne paraît, voir brièvement Georgoudi 1994-95.

6 A propos du 'fantasme' de ce monothéisme féminin, voir les analyses et la démarche historique de Philippe Borgeaud (1996).

7 Lévêque 1985:49.

8 Guthrie 1957:20.

9 Georgoudi 1994-95:291-92.

littéraires, épigraphiques et archéologiques, non pas pour leur imposer l'image— qu'on aurait déjà préfabriquée—d'une puissance universelle et a-temporelle, aux contours flous, nommée Gaia ou Gê, mais pour y examiner les façons dont cette déesse a été appréhendée par les Grecs, dans les divers lieux de culte et selon les différentes époques. En situant ainsi Gê dans l'espace et le temps, on pourrait sans doute mieux comprendre un fait plutôt paradoxal: à savoir, que cette Terre si maternelle, dotée, surtout par des modernes, d'une telle ampleur, occupe en fait une place assez restreinte dans les cultes des cités grecques où, de surcroît, elle n'est pas honorée en tant que Mère, en tant que *Mèter*.

Je me demande même si la prépondérance accordée souvent par les modernes à la figure de Gê n'est pas due, dans une large mesure, à un autre facteur, d'ordre méthodologique. Car on façonne d'habitude son image sur une base presque exclusivement 'littéraire,' en n'utilisant comme matériau que des récits mythiques, des traditions, des histoires légendaires. Quant aux faits culturels, plutôt maigres, ou bien on les délaisse, ou bien on les cite sans se poser de questions sur leur pauvreté. Parfois même on procède de façon très sélective en ne privilégiant que *certaines* des données littéraires. C'est ainsi que plusieurs hellénistes évoquent inlassablement le fameux prologue des *Euménides* d'Eschyle, pour installer la Terre, une fois pour toutes, à l'origine de l'oracle de Delphes, en tant que première détentrice de l'inspiration prophétique. Ou encore, on saisit chez Pausanias quelques bribes d'information pour introniser Gê (ou même la 'Terre-Mère') aux oracles d'Olympie et de Dodone, en tant que 'première occupante' de ces lieux mantiques. On sait cependant que ni les fouilles jusqu'à ce jour ni d'autres données culturelles n'ont pu confirmer la 'priorité' de Gê sur Apollon ou Zeus—ce qu'on avoue parfois à regret, tout en continuant à croire fermement à une Gaia primitive, qui aurait régné sur ses oracles 'telluriques' avant d'en être 'effacée' par des 'nouveaux dieux.'¹⁰

Ainsi, au lieu d'examiner conjointement et de manière contrastive tant les faits mythiques que les faits culturels, on met principalement en valeur les aspects mythiques de Gaia, auxquels on assujettit et on adapte tout autre élément du dossier. Mais de cette façon, on trace le portrait d'une puissance divine aux traits hypertrophiés, dont les pouvoirs ne seraient parfois usurpés que par ceux qu'on appelle les 'dieux-fils' (Lévêque 1985:204). Car ces divinités mâles seraient plus aptes, dit-on, à répondre aux besoins des cités archaïques, dans le cadre d'une religion civique à caractère aristocratique et davantage citadin.

10 J'ai eu l'occasion d'aborder ces questions, d'un point de vue critique, dans une étude sur le personnel des oracles grecs (Georgoudi 1998). Sur les 'virtualités mantiques' de Gaia et ses relations avec Apollon et les autres puissances de l'oracle delphique, cf. Detienne 1998:160-69.

A cette question relative à la préférence marquée pour le profil *mythique* de Gaia/Gé, aux dépens de son existence culturelle, vient s'ajouter un autre problème tout aussi épineux, problème qu'on pourrait formuler au moyen d'une interrogation: les Grecs, faisaient-ils ou non une distinction—plus ou moins perceptible—entre: a) la déesse Terre, avec son individualité et sa propre histoire, clairement dessinées depuis la *Théogonie* hésiodique, une déesse qui a sa place parmi les autres puissances divines, et qui reçoit, dans certains endroits, les honneurs des hommes; b) la terre conçue comme matière, comme entité cosmique ou, plus particulièrement, comme élément de la nature, comme un espace qu'on cultive (ou non), et qui produit la nourriture pour l'homme et l'animal; et c) la terre en tant que territoire d'une cité, en tant que sol foulé par les citoyens et qu'on chérit comme une mère, en tant que terre-patrie, pour laquelle on peut donner sa vie? Et si la réponse à cette question s'avérait positive, comment pourrait-on déceler la distinction qui s'opère, et quelles formes prenait-elle selon les différents contextes?¹¹

Il est vrai que, pour plusieurs hellénistes, une telle interrogation ne se pose même pas, elle n'a aucune raison d'être. Si parfois on consent à s'en occuper, c'est pour l'expédier de façon la plus brève, en considérant qu'il s'agit là d'un faux problème, en affirmant, par exemple, que les Grecs ne faisaient pas la différence entre une entité cosmique, une réalité naturelle, et la puissance divine qui la représentait. C'est sans doute pour cette raison que de nombreux traducteurs et commentateurs des textes grecs, ou encore des spécialistes de la culture grecque, dotent négligemment et sans justification, le mot *gaia* ou *gé* d'un gamma *majuscule*, en voyant presque partout surgir une déesse Terre (avec T majuscule), ou plus exactement une déesse Terre-Mère (avec T et M en majuscules), puisque la 'Terre' ne saurait être que 'Mère'.¹²

11 C'est à partir de ce genre d'interrogations qu'on devrait étudier, par exemple, le sens des mots *gaia/gé* dans les formules juratoires. Cette question, nous l'avons posée dans une série de séminaires sur le serment (cf. *Annuaire de l'EPHE, Section des Sciences Religieuses* 1993-94. 102:230-31, et 1997-98. 106:279). En même temps, nous avons exploré la signification de termes, comme 'terre' (γᾱῖα/γῆ), 'soleil' (ἥλιος), 'ciel' (οὐρανός), 'lumière' (φῶς, φάος), 'nuit' (νύξ), 'éther' (αἰθήρ), 'air' (ἄήρ) etc., dans certaines expressions invocatoires. Il arrive, en effet, qu'un personnage tragique s'adresse à ces éléments du kosmos, pour exprimer son émotion ou sa détresse, pour qu'ils voient ce qu'il endure, pour qu'ils soient témoins de ses malheurs, de ses souffrances. Dans ce sens, la terre peut être sentie et invoquée comme 'mère' (cf. Eur. *Hipp.* 601-02), sans qu'elle devienne l'inévitable 'Terre-Mère' des modernes. Mais ce sujet demande un développement à part.

12 Cf., parmi plusieurs exemples, Assael 1998:112 ss. Cette tendance a été aussi signalée et dénoncée par Nicole Loraux, en parlant de la terre d'Athènes: 'l'histoire des religions a, une fois pour toutes et sans recours, doté *gé* d'une majuscule; peu importe dès lors que Platon n'en donne pas à la terre athénienne' (1996:143; mais cf. 134). Avouons cependant qu'il nous est arrivé à suivre cette tendance, en transformant parfois la 'terre' en 'Terre,' dans le but de marquer l'importance dont se revêt cet élément dans un contexte donné. Il n'empêche que l'emploi abusif de la majuscule risque d'alimenter la confusion et d'entretenir l'image artificielle d'une Terre introuvable.

Ainsi, dans la plupart des cas, on parle comme si l'équation *gaia/gê* = Gaia/Gê était une évidence, une certitude qui s'imposait. Pour donner un exemple, la Gaia de la *Théogonie* d'Hésiode et la *gaia/gê* des *Travaux et les jours* ne constitueraient que la même entité divine, la vénérable Terre-Mère. D'ailleurs—dira-t-on—la *gê* n'est-elle pas, dans les *Travaux* (563), qualifiée de 'mère de tous' (γῆ πάντων μήτηρ), une mère qui produit des 'fruits de toutes sortes' (καρπὸν σύμμικτον)?¹³ Voilà donc notre 'Terre-Mère,' bien présente dans ce poème. Soit. Mais, dans ce cas, on a le droit de se demander pourquoi cette supposée Terre-Mère des *Travaux* ne se nomme pas, tout simplement, Gê ou Gaia, pourquoi il faudrait qu'on la devine non seulement derrière le mot *gê* (ou *gaia*, cf. 232), mais aussi derrière d'autres termes désignant la 'terre' (avec plus ou moins de nuances sémantiques), à savoir, *aroura* (cf. 237), ou *chthôn* (cf. 479).¹⁴

Certes, on pourrait rétorquer que ce poème hésiodique n'est pas un calendrier de cultes, où chaque puissance est clairement identifiée par son nom unique, accompagné ou non d'une épithète particulière. La liberté poétique permet sans doute de jongler avec la 'Terre' et la 'terre,' et de se représenter la déesse 'Terre-Mère' derrière chaque motte de l'*aroura*, surtout lorsque cette ἄρουρα est qualifiée de ζεῖδωρος ('féconde,' cf. 117), ou encore derrière chaque parcelle de la *chthôn*, d'autant plus que cette χθών est considérée comme δία ('divine,' cf. 479). Admettons que tout cela soit probable. Mais alors, pourquoi le paysan d'Hésiode n'adresse-t-il pas ses prières à cette 'Terre-Mère,' censée être bien présente dans les *Travaux*, pourquoi implore-t-il la 'pure' (ἀγνή) Déméter¹⁵, et remet-il surtout son sort entre les mains de Zeus *Chthonien*¹⁶ et *Olympien* (465, 474), responsable (avec Déméter) de la maturation du blé et de bonnes récoltes?¹⁷

13 Cf. Rudhardt (1990:376): 'Lorsque les Grecs appellent *Gaia* mère, ils ne pensent pas toujours à son rôle théogonique; ... Chez Hésiode, ce n'est pas dans la *Théogonie* qu'elle reçoit ce nom, c'est dans les *Travaux*' (et ici l'auteur renvoie précisément au vers 563, cité ci-dessus).

14 Notons que, sur un plan général, *gaia/gê* et *chthôn* présentent des aspects comparables, voire communs. Toutes les deux sont considérées comme des éléments nourriciers, capables de 'nourrir (de leurs fruits) beaucoup d'êtres': *gaia poluphorbè* (Hom. *Il.* 9.568; cf. Hes. *Theog.* 693: *gaia pheresbios*); *chthôn pouluboteira* (Hom. *Il.* 3.89; Hes. *Op.* 510). Toutes les deux sont qualifiées de 'noires': *gaia melaina* (Hom. *Il.* 2.699; cf. Solon, fr. 30.5 Gentili-Prato: *gê melaina*); *kelainè chthôn* (Hom. *Il.* 16.384). Toutes les deux sont de grandes dimensions: *apeirôn gaia*, 'terre sans limites, immense' (Hes. *Theog.* 187); *eureia chthôn*, 'terre vaste, large' (Hom. *Il.* 4.182)—la *chthôn* est, d'ailleurs, conçue souvent comme une surface.

15 Qu'on n'aura aucune raison d'identifier ici à Gaia/Gê, comme l'auraient souhaité ceux qui cherchent désespérément la 'Terre-Mère.'

16 Ce Zeus *Chthonios*, loin de représenter un Zeus 'Infernal,' comme l'on dit souvent, offre un autre exemple de l'association entre Zeus et la *chthôn*, en tant que terre qu'on cultive (cf. *Travaux* 479), une terre nourricière (voir, ci-dessus, n. 14). Il ne faudrait donc pas mettre au même niveau Zeus *Chthonios* et Zeus *Katachthonios*, comme semble le faire West (1978:276, 465). Une étude systématique reste encore à faire sur cet aspect sémantique de *chthôn* et de *chthonios* par rapport aux différents sens des adjectifs *epichthonios*, *hupochthonios*, *katachthonios*.

17 On connaît la place importante qu'occupe Zeus, dans les *Travaux*, en tant que divinité dispensatrice de richesses (cf. 379), en tant que dieu 'très fort' (ἐπισθενής), maître absolu des pluies (cf. 415-16, 483-90).

Quant au petit nombre des cultes connus de Gaia/Gê, il constitue un fait qui ne semble pas intéresser grand-monde. L.R. Farnell, un des rares à s'en être préoccupé, a essayé de l'expliquer: pour une religion hautement 'anthropomorphique,' comme celle des Grecs, il serait difficile d'ériger en 'personnalité active' une figure avec un nom (Gê) si *materialistic*. Mais comme Farnell croit à l'importance du 'culte de la terre' pour 'toutes les tribus helléniques,' il fait appel à la vieille bonne méthode de l'assimilation et découvre Gaia/Gê derrière d'autres puissances, comme Thémis, Rhéa, Cybèle, Déméter *etc.* En revanche, M.P. Nilsson, bien qu'il consacre peu de pages à Gê, en guise d'introduction à la partie concernant Déméter, critique fermement les tenants d'une soi-disant *Mutterreligion*, qu'on professe en se fondant principalement sur la littérature et les spéculations philosophiques. Il note avec justesse la pauvreté cultuelle de Gê, et la quasi absence de fêtes, qu'il semble imputer à la 'personnification pâle et chétive' de l'élément terre, dont la déesse Gê n'arrive pas à se détacher complètement.¹⁸

Enfin, d'aucuns justifient cette pénurie de cultes en l'honneur de Gaia/Gê, en évoquant l'omniprésence' et l'ubiquité' de cette divinité.¹⁹ On part du principe que le culte exige normalement une affinité privilégiée entre une localité et certaines divinités; or la terre, en tant qu'universelle, est partout, elle représente une réalité palpable, visible de tous, elle fait intrinsèquement partie de l'existence humaine et, par conséquent, il n'y aurait aucun besoin d'instituer des cultes particuliers en l'honneur de la déesse qui l'incarne. J'avoue que ce raisonnement me laisse un peu sur ma faim. Et je ne peux pas m'empêcher de m'interroger sur la question que j'ai esquissée tout à l'heure, et qui mériterait, à mon avis, plus d'attention: à savoir le décalage qu'on observe entre un discours pléthorique des anciens ou, plus exactement, des Athéniens (mais aussi de certains modernes qui les prennent au mot) sur la 'terre,' voire la 'terre-mère,' et les maigres cultes de Gê signalés dans les cités grecques, des cultes qui, de surcroît, ignorent une Gê *Mèter*.²⁰

18 Farnell 1907:1-28; Nilsson 1967:456-61, avec bibliographie. Cf. aussi Burkert (1977:272), qui souligne le très modeste rôle que joue Gaia dans la religion traditionnelle, et qui remarque, à juste titre, que ni Déméter ni la Grande Déesse de l'Asie Mineure ne sauraient être identifiées à la 'Terre.'

19 Je fais ici allusion à une intéressante discussion qui a eu lieu, il y a quelques années, à l'Université de Genève, grâce à l'amitié et la gentillesse de Philippe Borgeaud.

20 De ce point de vue, je ne vois pas à quoi se réfère L.-M. L'Homme-Wéry (1995:145), lorsqu'elle parle des 'autres cultes consacrés à la Terre où elle est perçue comme Mère' (c'est moi qui souligne). Il faudrait peut-être s'entendre sur le sens de ce que l'auteur appelle 'culte' ou 'plan cultuel' (*ibid.*, p. 143 et n. 14). Car ni l'éventuelle personnification de la terre en tant que mère, ni même sa dimension théogonique (cf. Solon fr. 30.3-7 Gentili-Prato) n'impliquent automatiquement l'existence d'un culte en l'honneur d'une 'Terre-Mère.' Certes, L'Homme-Wéry (1996) soutient l'identité' entre la 'Terre-Noire' de Solon (toujours avec des majuscules) et 'la Mère des divinités olympiennes, dont le culte est fondé par Solon sur l'Agora d'Athènes' (cf. L'Homme-Wéry 1995:143 n. 13). Mais cette thèse exige une longue discussion qui n'a pas sa place ici.

Pour illustrer ces réflexions et cette problématique, je voudrais prendre, à titre expérimental, un autre exemple, celui de la terre d'une cité, qu'elle soit ou non associée à une 'déclaration d'autochtonie.'

On a beaucoup écrit et on continue à écrire sur les mythes d'autochtonie et sur le discours qu'ils suscitent dans une cité comme Athènes, ou encore à propos d'une ville comme Thèbes. Partant de ce sujet privilégié, bon nombre de chercheurs ont créé, petit à petit, un autre mythe en façonnant une importante et non moins imposante divinité nommée Terre-Mère. Et comme ces savants se préoccupent d'habitude peu de la réalité culturelle d'une telle figure, on a parfois l'impression, en les lisant, que cette Terre-Mère constitue une puissance divine majeure, fondamentale pour la vie et les pratiques religieuses de la cité.

Les exemples de ce type de confusion abondent. Je me contente d'en mentionner un: dans son ouvrage *De abstinentia* (ii, 32), Porphyre, en citant Théophraste, parle de la 'terre' (γη), qualifiée de 'notre nourrice et mère' (ὡς τροφῶν καὶ μητρὸς ἡμῶν). La terre, dit le texte, est 'le foyer commun des dieux et des hommes (θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων ἐστία), et il faut que tous ... nous lui chantions des hymnes et la chérissions comme celle qui nous a enfantés (ὡς τεκοῦσαν)'. En commentant ce texte, dans son édition de l'ouvrage de Porphyre (*CUF*, 1979:212), Jean Bouffartigue fait, entre autres, cette remarque: 'La Terre-Mère [avec majuscules, bien entendu] jouissait en Attique d'une particulière vénération, qu'il ne faut pas séparer de la prétention des Athéniens à l'autochtonie. La Terre se distingue ainsi de l'ensemble des dieux et constitue même, comme dans ce passage, une *divinité* susceptible d'être mise en parallèle avec l'ensemble des dieux' (c'est moi qui souligne).

Tout d'abord, il faut préciser qu'il n'est pas question ici d'une 'Terre-Mère' en Attique. Ce passage attribué à Théophraste se réfère à la terre *en général*, et s'insère dans le discours contre le sacrifice sanglant. D'autre part, on ne voit pas comment s'exprime la 'vénération particulière' de cette 'Terre-Mère,' puisqu'on ne trouve—au moins dans l'état actuel de notre documentation—aucun culte d'une Gè *Mètèr*, à Athènes ou, plus généralement, en Attique. Enfin, s'il est vrai que la *gè* se distingue ici des dieux (et, je dirais, des hommes aussi), cela ne la transforme pas nécessairement en une 'divinité' culturellement existante, comme pourrait le montrer le discours sur la terre civique, où l'on retrouve ce type de distinction (voir cidessous).

Mais venons-en à la question de la terre civique. A la suite de ce qui a été dit plus haut, je pense donc qu'il faudrait essayer d'établir une distinction, la plus nuancée possible, entre, d'une part, une déesse Gaia/Gè avec ses éventuels cultes civiques, et d'autre part, la terre d'une cité, ce sol qu'on glorifie, qu'on chérit comme une mère dont on chante les louanges, qu'on investit même d'un caractère sacré. Bien

entendu, cela ne nous empêche pas de chercher, par la suite, les associations éventuelles entre ces deux réalités. Mais cette distinction s'avère, me semble-t-il, nécessaire pour une série de raisons, dont je signalerai rapidement deux.

Premièrement, malgré les divergences qu'on peut signaler entre le modèle de l'autochtonie athénienne et celui de l'autochtonie thébaine,²¹ la terre (*gê*) de ces deux cités est souvent qualifiée (par le discours athénien) de 'mère' (μήτηρ) et de 'nourrice' (τροφός).²² C'est elle qui, d'une façon ou d'une autre, a enfanté et nourri les citoyens (ou, au moins, les premiers d'entre eux, comme à Thèbes), et c'est elle qui prend toute la charge de leur *paideia*, de leur éducation, comme le dira Étéocle dans les *Sept contre Thèbes* (Aesch. *Sept.* 18). Or, comme on l'a vu dans le cas de la terre hésiodique, on constate ici le même type de flexibilité lexicale: pour désigner cette terre civique, les textes n'emploient pas seulement les mots *gaia/gê*. Ils utilisent, de façon parfois interchangeable, et dans les mêmes contextes, d'autres termes apparentés, tels *chthôn*, sol, territoire, terre, ou *chôra*, pays.²³ Et comme il arrive avec la terre (*gê*), de la même façon le pays (*chôra*) peut être désigné comme 'mère' (*mêtèr*), ou/et comme 'nourrice' (*trophos*), pour renforcer justement ce côté maternel et nourricier du pays natal.²⁴

Parfois même, pour exprimer cette réalité complexe que constitue la terre civique, on emploie tout simplement, le mot 'cité,' *polis*. En fait, il peut y avoir un 'va-et-vient' entre *gaia/gê* et *polis*, l'un pouvant renvoyer à l'autre, l'un pouvant remplacer l'autre. Hésiode met côte à côte la 'Thèbes aux sept portes' et la 'terre cadméeenne,' comme si la deuxième servait d'apposition à la première.²⁵ Et plus tard, la cité thébaine sera appelée par Euripide 'cette terre aux sept tours.'²⁶ De façon comparable, les puissances divines de Troie sont désignées comme 'les dieux qui possèdent la cité,' mais qui ne sont autres que 'ceux de la terre prise' par les

21 Cf., sur ce point, Detienne 2000:54-56.

22 Cf. Pl. *Resp.* 3.414e; Isoc. *Paneg.* (4) 25 (Athènes); Aesch. *Sept.* 16 (Thèbes). Mais je dois préciser que ces qualifications, comme aussi celles dont il sera question par la suite, peuvent également s'appliquer à toute autre cité. Ainsi, Hécube appelle la terre de Troie 'nourricière' de ses enfants: ἰὼ γὰρ τροφίμῃ τῶν ἐμῶν τέκνων (Eur. *Tro.* 1301).

23 Cf. l'emploi des mots *gâ/gê* et *chthôn*, à propos de la terre thébaine (Eur. *Phoen.* 70-72, 937-39), ou de la terre attique (Eur. *Erechtheus* fr. 18, vv. 63, 68, 77, 89, Carrara). Des exemples analogues abondent, mais on ne peut pas en faire ici le relevé.

24 Cf. Pl. *Resp.* 3.414e, où l'expression *gê mêtèr* côtoie la phrase *peri mêtros kai trophou tês chôras*. Voir aussi Pl. *Menex.* 237bc: ὑπὸ μητρὸς τῆς χώρας, Dem. *Epit.* (60) 5: μητέρα τὴν χώραν.

25 Hes. *Op.* 162: ὕφ' ἐπταπύλῳ Θήβῃ, Καδμηίδι γαίῃ (avec le commentaire de Verdenius, 1985:101). Dans l'*Odyssée* déjà, Alkinoos demandera à Ulysse, l'étranger, quelle est sa *gaia*, son *demos*, sa *polis* (Hom., *Od.*, 8.555). Or, pour le scholiaste, *gaia* et *polis* sont des termes synonymes qui dénotent la même chose (εἰπέ δέ μοι γαίαν] εἰπέ μοι τὴν σὴν πόλιν).

26 Eur. *Phoen.* 245: ἐπτάπυργος ἄδε γὰρ.

Achéens.²⁷ De même, 'les dieux qui possèdent la cité' de Thèbes sont ceux de la *chôra*, mot qui peut remplacer, dans ce contexte, le terme *gê*, comme il a été dit; mais ils sont aussi qualifiés de 'gardiens des tours de cette terre,' c'est-à-dire, de cette cité.²⁸ Quant aux humains, un bon et loyal citoyen doit donner sa vie pour sauver sa *terre* qui est sa *cité*: *sôzein gaian*, ou *sôzein polin*, dira Euripide dans les *Phéniciennes* (948, 952). La fille (ou les filles) d'Érechthée, à Athènes, vont mourir 'pour la terre' (*pro gaïas*), ou pour le salut de 'ce pays' (*têsde chôras*, ou encore *huper chôras*), et leur mère Praxithea, qui veut sauver la cité (*sôsô polin*), sera louée par Athéna en tant que 'salvatrice de la terre, du sol civique' (*chthonos sôteira*).²⁹ Ces expressions (dont nous donnons ici quelques brefs indices) sont équivalentes, sans qu'elles soient absolument identiques.

Deuxièmement, ce pays, cette terre-mère, ce territoire-nourrice, cette cité, n'est pas seulement caractérisé par son aspect maternel et nourricier. Cette terre ne joue pas exclusivement le rôle d'une mère. Elle est aussi une sorte de père, elle est aussi *patris*. Et le terme *patris* ne signifie pas simplement ce que nous appelons 'patrie,' mais il désigne littéralement 'la terre du père' (ou, selon le contexte, 'des pères'), il délimite un espace fortement marqué par l'élément masculin. De ce point de vue, pour désigner la même réalité, on peut parler de la 'terre-patrie, la terre du père,' *patris*³⁰ *gaia*, ou de la 'terre paternelle' (*patrôia gê*), ou du 'sol paternel' (*patrôia chthôn*), ou encore de la 'cité paternelle' (*polis patrôia*).³¹ Et lorsqu'on songe à sa *patris* qui est sa *polis*, on pense naturellement à son 'père:' Médée évoquera ensemble son père et sa cité (ὦ πάτερ, ὦ πόλις), ou la demeure paternelle (πατρός δόμου) et sa *patra* (autre terme ici pour *patris*).³²

27 Cf. Aesch. Ag. 338-39: τοὺς πολισούχους θεοὺς τοὺς τῆς ἀλούσης γῆς.

28 Aesch. Sept. 271: χώρας τοῖς πολισούχοις θεοῖς; *ibid.*, 166-68: θεοὶ ... γὰς τᾶσδε πυργοφύλακες. Certes, cette relation, voire cette synonymie entre la 'terre' et la 'cité,' n'a pas échappé à certains commentateurs modernes. Par exemple, G.O. Hutchinson l'a bien signalée, dans son édition commentée des *Sept* (1985:72, comm. au vers 167); mais cette complexité n'a pas influé sur sa façon de concevoir la terre thébaine, qui n'est vue que sous les traits d'une 'Mother Earth' (Hutchinson, 1985:45, comm. aux vers 16-19, où l'auteur se limite à renvoyer tout simplement à l'ouvrage de Dieterich, *Mutter Erde*).

29 Eur. *Erechtheus* fr. 10, 39 (πρὸ γαίης; cf. Eur. *Ion* 278); fr. 18, 66 (τῆσδε χώρας); fr. 10, 42 (σώσω πόλιν); fr. 18, 63 (χθονὸς σάστρα), Carrara. Dans le *Rhésus* (154s.), Dolon dit qu'il veut bien 'courir le risque pour la terre,' et aller épier les navires des Grecs: ἐγὼ πρὸ γαίης τόνδε κίνδυνον θέλω ἰρίψας. Or, Hector avait auparavant (151-53) employé les mots *gê* et *patrôia polis* pour désigner la même réalité. Voir aussi Phanodemos, *FGrH* 324 fr. 4, Jacoby (ὑπὲρ χώρας); Dem. *Epit.* (60) 27 (σῶσαι τὴν χώραν). Cf. Eur. *Tro.* 1168: mourir 'pour la cité' (πρὸ πόλεως).

30 Sur l'emploi de l'adjectif *patris*, cf. Soph. *OT* 641: pour Créon, être chassé de la 'terre de ses pères' (γῆς πατρίδος) ou être tué sont deux maux équivalents. Voir également Ar. *Thesm.*, 859-60, où, pour Mnésilochos, sa *gê patris* est sa *cité*, Sparte. Sur *patris polis*, cf. Pind. *Ol.* 10.35-38. En tant que substantif, le mot *patris* s'associe à *polis* pour désigner le lieu d'origine d'une personne (cf. Eur. *Hec.* 905 s., ainsi qu'Eur. *Ion* 258-61 où, pour préciser l'identité de Créuse, quatre termes sont employés: *gê, patris, polis, patèr*, auxquels s'ajoute le 'nom' [ὄνομα] de la femme).

Certes, l'expression *patris gaia* (ou *gê patris*³³) n'est pas une invention des Tragiques. On la trouve déjà dans l'*Iliade* (2.140), lorsqu'Agamemnon exhorte les Achéens à partir pour la 'chère' (φίλην) *patrida gaian*, on la retrouve aussi dans l'*Odyssée*.³⁴ Dans le *Bouclier* pseudo-hésiodique (1 et 12), c'est Alcmène et Amphitryon qui vont abandonner (comme Médée) *domous kai patrida gaian*, 'leur demeure et leur terre patrie' (Argos ou Tirynthe, selon les versions), pour venir à Thèbes, où Alcmène, unie à Zeus, enfanta Héraclès.

Or, à la place de *patris gaia*, on peut avoir *patris aia*—avec l'emploi de ce mot rare (αἶα) dans le sens de la 'terre'³⁵—ainsi qu'une autre expression analogue, hautement significative, à savoir, *patris aroura*. L'étranger qui arrive à Ithaque—qu'il s'agisse d'Athéna déguisée en Mentès, ou d'Ulysse qui n'a pas encore été reconnu—doit répondre à une question essentielle: quelle est sa terre (*gaia*), quelle est sa lignée (*geneè*) et l'*aroura* des ses pères?³⁶ La notion de la patrie englobe donc aussi la terre labourée (ou labourable), ces champs qu'on cultive à la sueur de son front pour les faire fructifier. *Patris aroura*: cette phrase homérique fait penser, me semble-t-il, au serment des éphèbes athéniens. En effet, ils prennent à témoin non seulement les onze puissances divines (*theoi*), nommées en premier, mais aussi 'les bornes de la patrie, les blés, les orges, les vignes, les oliviers, les figuiers.' Tous les fruits de la terre, dont le blé et l'orge en priorité, sont des éléments constitutifs de l'idée de la patrie, que les éphèbes s'apprennent à défendre.³⁷

La figure de la terre civique, en tant que 'terre-mère,' mais aussi 'terre du père,' en tant que sol productif mais aussi pays qu'on doit protéger, se constitue donc

31 Cf. à propos de la cité et la terre thébaines: Aesch. *Sept.* 582 (πόλιν πατρώαν), 585 (πατρίς τε γαῖα), 640 (πατρώας γῆς), 668 (πατρώας ... χθονός). Selon certains commentateurs de la pièce (cf. Lupas et Petre, 1981:204, comm. aux vers 639-41), cette *patris gaia* 's'oppose nettement à la *gê mêtèr* du prologue' (16). Pour P. Vidal-Naquet (1986:146), la terre est mère jusqu'au vers 585, où elle 'change de sexe, elle est *patris* au lieu de *mêtèr*.' Pour ma part, je ne pense pas qu'on ait affaire à une opposition, ou à une présumée évolution d'une nature maternelle à une nature paternelle, et j'avoue que je ne comprends pas très bien les raisons de ce supposé changement de sexe. L'étude conjointe de toutes ces expressions, qui qualifient la terre civique, suggère qu'on peut la considérer, *tout à la fois*, comme nourrice, comme patrie, comme mère (voir ci-dessous). Sur *patrôia chthôn*, cf. aussi Soph. *Aj.* 846: πατρώαν τὴν ἐμὴν ... χθόνα.

32 Eur. *Med.* 166-67; 502 s.; sur *patra/gê patrôia*, cf. également Eur. *Tro.* 386-90.

33 Cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 280: le chœur des Phéniciennes évoque, lui aussi, sa γῆ πατρίς qui l'a nourri (ἡ θρέψασά με).

34 Hom. *Od.* 5.207: Calypso s'adressant à Ulysse; 24.322: Ulysse parlant à Laërce.

35 Cette variante, on la trouve dans l'*Odyssée* 10.236 (πατρίδος αἶης), mais aussi chez Hésiode fr. 244 Merkelbach-West, du *Catalogue des femmes*.

36 Hom. *Od.* 1.406-07; 20.193: ποῦ δέ νύ οἱ γενεὴ καὶ πατρίς ἄρουρα;

37 Pour le texte du serment éphébique, voir: Tod 1948 vol. 2. n° 204. Remarquons que la *gê* thébaine, la terre qui a donné naissance aux premiers citoyens (*politai*) de Thèbes, est qualifiée par Phérécyde d'*aroura* (FGrH 3 F 22a Jacoby); cf. Apollod. *Bibl.* 3. 4.1 ss.: *ek gês*.

grâce à toute cette variété d'expressions, à toute cette richesse lexicale. Saurait-on représenter exhaustivement ces aspects multiples, ces caractères aussi bien féminins que masculins, à travers la personne d'une présumée 'Terre-Mère?' Pourquoi pas, dirait-on. Il est bien connu que, dans un système polythéiste, une divinité peut assumer plusieurs fonctions, elle peut traduire diverses facettes de la vie et des aspirations humaines. Oui, mais on pourrait, de nouveau, se demander pourquoi dans ce cas, depuis Homère, cette 'Terre-Mère' reste insaisissable sur le plan culturel, pourquoi elle n'arrive pas à émerger concrètement de ces images polysémiques de la terre où les humains ont vu le jour.

Allons plus loin. Ce triple caractère, nourricier, paternel et maternel,³⁸ de la terre civique, ou de la cité-terre, a été clairement exprimé par Isocrate, avec tout l'orgueil, voire toute l'arrogance qui caractérisent le discours athénien sur l'autochtonie:

'Si nous habitons cette cité (*sc.* Athènes), ce n'est pas après en avoir expulsé d'autres gens, ni après l'avoir occupée déserte, ni après nous être réunis en mélangeant plusieurs peuples; mais si belle et si pure (*καλῶς καὶ γνησίως*) est notre naissance, que la (terre) même d'où nous avons poussé (*ἔφυμεν*), nous l'avons occupée pendant tout le temps, étant autochtones,³⁹ et pouvant appeler notre cité des mêmes noms qu'on donne aux plus proches parents (*τοὺς οἰκειοτάτους*). Car, à nous seuls de tous les Grecs il appartient de l'appeler à la fois *nourrice* et *patrie* et *mère* (*τροφὸν καὶ πατρίδα καὶ μητέρα*).⁴⁰

'Nous seuls de tous les Grecs,' dit Isocrate, appelons ainsi notre cité. Mais ce sont les mêmes noms qu'on attribue aussi à la terre et la cité thébaines, même si c'est par l'intermédiaire d'un Eschyle ou d'un Euripide.⁴¹

Cependant, les Athéniens ne se contentent pas de chanter en solo les louanges de leur cité, de leur terre. Ils veulent plus. Ils considèrent que leur pays (*chōra*) mérite d'être loué 'par tous les hommes (*ὑπὸ πάντων ἀνθρώπων*) et non seule-

38 Sans oublier la fonction éducative qu'assume la terre civique. En rendant hommage aux soldats morts pour la cité, l'*epitaphios logos*, prononcé par Socrate, fait l'éloge de cette excellente *paideia* qu'ils ont reçue (*cf.* Pl. *Menex.* 237 ab).

39 Rosivach (1987) a raison d'observer que le mot *αὐτόχθων*, dans sa composition, ne signifie pas 'né ou issu de la (même) terre,' comme l'on traduit de façon récurrente, mais 'ayant (toujours) la même terre,' 'vivant (toujours) sur la même terre.' En ce sens, *autochtōn* ne serait pas la copie exacte de *gēgenēs*, qui désigne effectivement celui qui est 'né de la terre.'

40 Isoc. *Paneg.* (4) 24-25. Sans vouloir surinterpréter ce texte, notons cependant que les mot *trophos* vient avant le mot *mētēr*. Comme si l'on voulait mettre l'accent plutôt sur la qualité nourricière de la cité-terre, que sur son côté maternel. Mais nous reviendrons sur cette remarque. Quant au terme *patris* qui qualifie ici Athènes, on pourrait, plus précisément, le traduire par 'cité des pères.' *Cf.*, sur le même ton, Lysias *Epit.* (2) 17: les Athéniens, 'étant autochtones, ont possédé la même mère et patrie' (*τὴν αὐτὴν ... μητέρα καὶ πατρίδα*). Voir, ci-dessous, sur l'association entre les deux parents et la patrie/matrie.

41 Voir ci-dessus, notes 22 et 31; *cf.* aussi Eur. *Phoen.* 948: *πατρῶν γαῖαν*.

ment par nous,' comme le dit Socrate (Pl. *Menex.* 237 c). Mais pourquoi—auraient demandé quelques esprits naïfs. Pour plusieurs raisons, répond Socrate, dont la première et la plus importante est que ce pays est 'aimé des dieux' (θεοφιλής). 'Et celui que les dieux ont loué—continue Socrate—comment ne serait-il pas justifié à recevoir la louange de tous les hommes sans exception?' (*ibid.* 237 d).

On touche ici à une question, à laquelle nous avons fait allusion plus haut (p.119), et qui mériterait d'être traitée séparément: à savoir la distinction entre les dieux (*theoi*) d'une part, et la *gaia/gê* de l'autre—la terre en général et la terre civique en particulier. Disons brièvement ici que cette distinction remonte loin, au temps du partage du monde entre les trois frères puissants, Zeus, Poséidon, Hadès. Car, comme le rappelle avec force Poséidon, indigné contre les diktats de Zeus: 'le tout a été partagé en trois, et chacun a eu sa part d'honneur ... mais la terre est un bien commun à nous tous (γαῖα ... ξυνὴ πάντων), ainsi que le haut Olympe.'⁴²

Même Hésiode, qui a donné à Gaïa/Gê ses titres de noblesse, sait très bien parler de la 'terre' en tant qu'élément cosmique, ne faisant pas partie de la communauté des dieux. Dans le prélude de la *Théogonie*, le poète demande aux Muses Héliconiennes de dire 'comment naquirent tout d'abord les dieux (*theoi*) et la terre (*gaia*), et les fleuves et la mer immense ... et les étoiles ... et le large ciel là-haut.'⁴³ Et lorsque Zeus attaque Typhon, c'est toute la terre qui retentit, qui gémit, qui bout, et cette terre est désignée non seulement par le mot *gaia*, mais aussi par le terme *chthôn*.⁴⁴ Mais cette distinction entre *theoi* et *gaia* ne manque pas d'étonner plus d'un. West (1966:190) dira, dans son commentaire, qu'elle est 'un peu surprenante' (*a little surprising*), puisque la terre et tout ce qui suit sont de réalités divines. Sans doute. Mais, comme il a été remarqué plus haut, le caractère sacré ou divin qui peut, éventuellement, marquer une entité naturelle ne lui confère pas obligatoirement le rang d'une divinité. De ce point de vue, le statut de la terre, dans les *Lois* de Platon, est un exemple significatif.

Dans la cité platonicienne des *Nomoi*, le soleil, la lune, les astres, la terre, sont dotés, comme on le sait, d'une nature divine.⁴⁵ D'autre part, les colons-fondateurs de la cité des *Lois*, qui se partagent la terre (*gên*) et les maisons, doivent prendre soin (*therapeuein*)⁴⁶ de leur *chôra* (pays), qui est leur *patris*, et que Platon qualifie de *theos* (*Leg.* 5.739e-740a). Il s'agit, cependant, d'une 'déesse' distincte 'des dieux

42 Hom. *Il.* 15.189-93.

43 Hes., *Theog.* 108-110; cf. *Theog.* 187 et 693, ci-dessus, note 14.

44 Hes. *Theog.* 839-47. Il n'empêche que certains éditeurs et traducteurs de la *Théogonie* font fi de ces 'subtilités' du vocabulaire hésiodique et écrivent le mot *gaia* de ces passages avec un gamma majuscule!

45 Pl. *Leg.* 10.886de (*theous kai theia onta*).

46 Ce verbe a aussi le sens de 'servir', 'honorer.'

du pays et des démons locaux,⁴⁷ il s'agit d'une terre⁴⁸ qui, même divinisée, n'appartient pas au panthéon de la cité des *Lois*,⁴⁹ contrairement au Soleil, Hélios, qui devient, grâce à l'initiative de Platon, un dieu important avec culte public et enceinte sacrée.⁵⁰ Donc pas de Gaia/Gê parmi les divinités, auxquelles la cité crétoise rend des honneurs (telles Zeus, Athéna, Hestia, Héphaïstos, Artémis, Apollon, Déméter, Dionysos, Hadès etc.). La *gê* de la cité des *Lois* aura une autre destinée: elle sera (avec le foyer de l'habitation) consacrée à tous les dieux, elle sera un *anathèma* (*Leg.* 12.955 e).

Enfin, à Thèbes, on trouve aussi la même distinction entre, d'une part, les dieux —qu'ils soient appelés 'dieux du pays' (ἐγχώριοι), ou dieux qui 'possèdent la cité' (πολιτισσοῦχοι, πολιόχοι)—et, d'autre part, la terre civique, investie de toutes les valeurs dont il a été question: valeurs maternelles, nourricières, paternelles. Devant la menace ennemie, Étéocle mobilise jeunes et vieux pour qu'ils portent secours à ces divinités, ainsi qu'à cette entité polyvalente, désignée comme cité, comme terre, 'mère' et 'nourrice très chère,' comme sol paternel et bienveillant qui a élevé les citoyens, comme *patris gaia* à laquelle on demeure pour toujours redevable.⁵¹ On dirait qu'entre les dieux thébains et cette instance à plusieurs qualifications, il n'y aurait pas de place pour la présumée 'Terre-Mère'—qui reste d'ailleurs absente du panthéon civique (voir ci-dessous).

Il est temps de revenir à la terre athénienne. L'aspect 'paternel' de cette terre est parfois mis en avant et accentué par les orateurs. Pour Lycurgue (*Leoc.* 15), les Athéniens l'emportent sur les autres hommes par leur piété (*eusebôs*) envers les dieux, par leur respect (*hosiôs*) envers les parents, et par leur zèle (*philotimôs*) envers la *patris*, la 'terre des pères.'

Mais c'est surtout Démosthène qui met en valeur, dans son *Épitaphios*, le côté paternel de la terre athénienne. La cité, dit l'orateur, témoigne d'un grand attache-

47 *Leg.* 5.740a: ἐγχωρίους θεούς τε ἅμα καὶ δαίμονας.

48 Rappelons que *gê* et *chôra*, sans être des réalités absolument identiques, sont équivalentes, souvent interchangeables et qualifiées de la même façon: voir ci-dessus, note 24.

49 Ce qui n'a pas empêché Léon Robin, le traducteur des œuvres complètes de Platon dans la *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade* (Paris, 1950) d'identifier cette patrie-*theos* à 'la Déesse-Mère, Déméter' (vol. 2.1556).

50 Un *temenos*, que le dieu partage d'ailleurs avec Apollon; ces deux divinités auront même en commun certains prêtres (*Leg.* 12.945e; 947a).

51 Cf. Aesch. *Sept.* 14-20, 69, 110-12, 271 etc.; voir aussi, ci-dessus, note 31. Aux vers 639 s., Polynice appelle en criant les 'dieux tutélaires de la terre paternelle' (θεούς γενεθλίουσ ... πατρώας γῆς). Ces dieux *genethlioi* ne sont autres que les dieux *eggeneis* du vers 582: ils sont les dieux de Thèbes, les divinités ancestrales des Thébains qui constituent un seul *genos*, une seule race (cf. Hutchinson 1985:136, comm. au vers 582 s.). Dans la cité d'Athènes, Praxithéa exprime parfaitement cette alliance entre les dieux civiques et la *patris*, qu'on doit protéger et sauver du danger (Eur. *Erechtheus* fr. 10, 15, Carrara).

ment à ceux qui tombent à la guerre, et elle organise en leur honneur des funérailles nationales, les considérant comme des héros vaillants. Or, continue Démosthène:

‘La bonne naissance (*eugeneia*) de ces hommes est de temps immémorial reconnue dans toute l’humanité. Car, ce n’est pas seulement à un père (*patera*) qu’on peut, pour eux et pour chacun de leurs aïeux lointains (*tôn anô progonôn*), faire remonter individuellement leur naissance (*phusin*), mais collectivement (*koinêi*) à toute leur *patris* existante, dont on reconnaît qu’ils sont les fils autochtones. Car seuls de tous les humains (*anthrôpôn*), ils ont habité celle [la terre] dont ils ont poussé (*ephusan*), et ils l’ont léguée à leurs descendants; aussi est-on fondé à croire que, si les autres hommes, qui sont venus comme immigrants (*epêludas*) dans les cités et qui en sont les citoyens en titre, sont assimilés aux enfants adoptifs, eux sont de véritables (*gnêsious*) citoyens de la patrie, par naissance (*gonôî*).⁵²

Dans ses recherches riches, fines et suggestives sur l’autochtonie athénienne, Nicole Loraux commente de la façon suivante ce texte de Démosthène:

‘C’est ainsi que l’*épitaphios* de Démosthène dote les Athéniens d’une origine double qui ne consiste pas, bien sûr, à naître tout bonnement d’un père et d’une mère, mais à se rattacher, chacun dans son individualité, à un père et, tous collectivement à la *patrie*;’ la terre des pères—dit N.L.—‘prend la place de la mère, au point d’en évincer jusqu’au signifiant: en lieu et place du binôme *mêtêr kai patris*, le couple *patêr/patris* assume désormais la fonction d’un couple parental, mais d’un couple parental *totalemment masculinisé*’ (c’est moi qui souligne).⁵³

Et encore, à propos du même texte:

‘Le problème est qu’en réalité la Terre-Mère⁵⁴ a disparu avec le nom de la mère: fils de la patrie, les Athéniens naissent de la terre des pères (*patris*); le féminin, cette médiation, s’efface encore un peu et, d’un côté comme de l’autre, la paternité domine le signifiant.⁵⁵

Nicole Loraux pense ainsi que ce texte constitue ‘une version extrémiste’ du discours sur l’autochtonie. En éliminant complètement ‘la maternité primordiale,’ les ‘enfantements solitaires de Gê Mêtêr,’ ce texte ferait preuve d’un ‘extrémisme de la paternité.’ ‘L’oraison funèbre de Démosthène’—conclut Nicole Loraux—‘donne à cette occultation de la maternité des femmes son expression la plus achevée.’

Nicole Loraux a parfaitement raison de mettre en évidence le côté ‘paternel’ du discours de Démosthène. Mais, pour ma part, je me montrerai moins sévère envers

52 Dem. *Epit.* (60) 4.

53 Loraux 1981:66.

54 L’emploi ici des majuscules doit, sans doute, être imputé à la force de l’habitude, car Nicole Loraux a, par ailleurs, vivement critiqué cet usage (voir ci-dessus, n.12).

55 Loraux 1996:44.

le grand orateur. Car on pourrait, sans doute, nuancer la position de Démosthène. On pourrait, en effet, se demander si l'orateur efface vraiment le féminin de son discours, s'il en occulte réellement l'aspect maternel. De ce point de vue, il serait intéressant de regarder la suite de ce passage de Démosthène:

‘Il me semble en outre que si les fruits (*karpous*) dont vit l'humanité sont apparus d'abord chez nous, cela constitue, indépendamment du très grand bienfait qui en est résulté pour tous, une preuve [‘un signe:’ *sêmeion*] reconnue que notre pays est la *mère* de nos ancêtres (*μητέρα τὴν χώραν εἶναι τῶν ἡμετέρων προγόνων*). Car tous les êtres qui enfantent (*ta tikton-ta*) tirent d'emblée de la nature même la nourriture (*τροφήν*) qu'ils apportent à leurs rejetons, ce qui a fait précisément notre pays (*ἡ χώρα*).⁵⁶

On pourrait remarquer que, lorsqu'il parle de la bonne et belle naissance (car dans le terme *eugeneia* les deux notions cohabitent), Démosthène met l'accent sur le père, les pères, en tant qu'aïeux, ainsi que sur la *patris* commune, la ‘terre des pères.’ Tandis qu'il qualifie le pays de ‘mère,’ quand il veut souligner le fait que cette ‘mère’ produit des fruits (*karpous*). Le rôle principal d'une mère, c'est de nourrir ses enfants, d'être aussi une bonne *trophos*. Comme si, pour tout le reste, le père restait l'élément indispensable et irremplaçable. Je dirais donc que Démosthène, tout en valorisant le ‘paternel,’ ne gomme pas pour autant le ‘maternel,’ mais il lui assigne une tâche bien déterminée.

Par ailleurs, dans une cité qui reconnaît le principe de la parenté bilatérale, telle que l'a définie surtout la loi de Périclès, en 451/450—loi selon laquelle, on est citoyen ou *citoyenne*⁵⁷ celui ou celle dont les deux parents sont citoyens athéniens—dans une telle cité donc, on peut très bien concevoir une autochtonie *double*, c'est-à-dire attribuer à la terre civique une double fonction, maternelle et paternelle—comme d'ailleurs nous invitent à le faire les qualifications qui caractérisent cette terre. Seulement, la fonction maternelle est avant tout celle qui consiste à produire la nourriture et à nourrir les enfants comme une bonne nourrice.

Dans ce sens, la terre est bien entendu ‘mère’ (*mètèr*), mais elle est surtout reconnue comme nourrice (*trophos*), ou plus précisément comme ‘nourrice des jeunes gens’ (*kourotrophos*); et également elle est celle qui produit, qui porte les fruits (*karpophoros*). Cela pourrait, peut-être, expliquer ce fait paradoxal que j'ai signalé au début. A savoir que, alors qu'on ne trouve pas, à Athènes et plus généralement en Attique, le culte d'une Terre-Mère, d'une Gê *Mètèr*, on rencontre des cultes de Gê *Kourotrophos* et de Gê *Karpophoros* (‘Porteuse de fruits’). La première partageait avec Déméter *Chloè* (la ‘Verdoyante’)⁵⁸ un sanctuaire sur le

56 Dem. *Epit.* (60) 5.

57 En soulignant ce mot, je fais allusion à la question controversée de la citoyenneté des femmes dans la cité, question qui exigerait un long débat.

58 Je reviens ailleurs sur le sens et les implications de cette épithète cultuelle de Déméter.

flanc sud de l'Acropole (Paus. 1.22.3), une cohabitation intéressante qui montre que, sur le plan culturel, on ne confond pas Gê et Déméter, ce qui arrive parfois sur un plan littéraire, par exemple, chez Euripide.

Quant à Gê *Karpophoros*, il semble qu'il existait, sur l'Acropole, un petit *temenos*, un petit enclos consacré à cette divinité d'après un oracle, comme il résulte d'une inscription gravée sur le rocher, de l'époque romaine.⁵⁹ Il se trouvait peut-être entre le Parthénon et l'Érechthéion, sans doute là où Pausanias (1.24.3) avait vu une statue de Gê, qui—levant éventuellement les mains dans une position de prière—'implorait Zeus de faire pleuvoir, soit parce que les Athéniens avaient besoin de la pluie, soit parce que la sécheresse avait frappé tous les Grecs.' On retrouve ici la relation étroite, qu'on constate aussi ailleurs, entre Gê et Zeus, voire la dépendance de la première par rapport au second.

Cependant, ni Gê *Kourotrophos* ni Gê *Karpophoros* ne sauraient s'identifier à une 'Terre-Mère'—identification opérée, de façon plutôt négligeante, par certains. Et le fait reste qu'à Athènes, la déesse Terre n'est pas reconnue *culturellement* en tant que 'Mère.' En outre, elle n'est pas honorée, comme on pouvait s'y attendre, sur l'Acropole, dans l'Érechthéion, dans ce sanctuaire acropolitain considéré comme le haut lieu de la tradition et de la mémoire de l'autochtonie athénienne, là où Athènes avait rassemblé et installé les cultes de différentes puissances divines ou héroïques, associées aux origines de la cité.

Quant à Thèbes, et malgré un discours surabondant des Tragiques sur la 'terre-mère' thébaine, il faut tout d'abord remarquer, sur un plan général, que la déesse Gaia/Gê ne semble pas avoir eu des cultes significatifs dans cette cité. Nous n'avons que deux maigres indices du v^e siècle avant notre ère, à savoir deux *horoi* portant le nom de cette divinité. Sur l'une de ces bornes, on lit simplement le nom Γᾶς. Sur l'autre, il est question d'un sanctuaire de la Terre, qualifiée *non pas* de *mètēr* (Mère), mais de *makaira* ('bienheureuse') et de *telesphoros* ('celle qui mène à terme, qui accomplit')⁶⁰—deux épithètes qu'on retrouve plus tard dans l'*Hymne orphique à Gê* (26, 10 et 2 respectivement).

Certes, on n'est jamais à l'abri de nouvelles découvertes susceptibles d'apporter au dossier des éléments nouveaux, et de démentir les hypothèses que nous formulons. Ainsi, entre 1993 et 1995, on a trouvé à Thèbes quelque 250 tablettes en linéaire B, dont certaines portent les mots *ma-ka*. Or, deux spécialistes de la linéaire B, Louis Godart et Anna Sacconi, donnent à ces mots la valeur d'un théonyme et procèdent à l'identification suivante: 'μᾶ Γᾶ = *ma-ka* = μήτηρ Γῆ, la Terre Mère.'⁶¹

59 *IG*, ii/iii², 4758: Γῆς καρποφόρου κατὰ μαιντεῖαν (*sic*).

60 *IG*, vii, 2452; voir W. Vollgraff, dans *BCH* 25 (1901):363; et surtout A.D. Keramopoulos (dans *AD* 3 (1917):354-55), qui corrige le Γ[αία]ς des *IG* en Γᾶς: Ηιαρὸν Γᾶς μακαίρας τελεσφόρο.

Mais tout cela reste encore conjectural. Premièrement, on doit attendre la publication de l'ensemble de ces documents. Deuxièmement, bien que ces spécialistes croient à l'existence d'un culte de la Terre-Mère dans la Thèbes mycénienne du xiii^e siècle avant notre ère, ils ne considèrent pas cette Terre-Mère comme une divinité *autonome*. Selon leur interprétation, cette Terre-Mère ne serait autre que Déméter, une Déméter associée, en l'occurrence, à Zeus et à Korè avec lesquels elle formerait une *triade*. Quoi qu'il en soit, leur argumentation n'est pas exempte d'une certaine confusion, lorsqu'ils disent à la page 107: 'Si un culte de la Terre Mère était attesté dans la Thèbes de Cadmos au xiii^e siècle avant notre ère, il est remarquable de constater qu'un même culte était célébré dans la Thèbes du premier millénaire' (c'est moi qui souligne). Après cette affirmation, on s'attendait à ce que les auteurs donnassent la preuve d'un culte de Gê *Mètèr* 'dans la Thèbes du premier millénaire.' Au lieu de cela, ils renvoient à l'inscription de Gaia *Makaira* et *Telesphoros* (citée plus haut), ainsi qu'à une remarque de Vollgraff (ci-dessus, note 60) sur la confusion entre 'la Terre et la Grande Mère des dieux' dans un passage du *Philoctète*.⁶² Mais Gaia *Makaira* et *Telesphoros* n'est pas *cultuellement* la même que Gaia *Mètèr*. Dans la pratique rituelle, les épicleses d'une puissance divine—qui sont d'une grande importance pour circonscrire sa figure et préciser ses différents champs d'action—ne sont pas interchangeables. Et j'ajouterais, qu'il ne suffit pas qu'un chœur tragique donne à Gê quelques traits de Rhéa ou de Cybèle, ou encore que Cybèle soit très présente 'en Béotie,' pour qu'on installe à Thèbes une 'Terre-Mère.'

Résumons. Sur un plan général, la terre, en tant qu'entité cosmique, peut être qualifiée de 'mère' et de 'nourrice,' elle peut même acquérir une dimension divine et avoir sa place parmi les *theia onta*.⁶³ On la chérit, on la glorifie, on la respecte, on souhaite que son propre corps soit, après la mort, mêlé (*meichthênai*) avec 'celle qui fait pousser et nourrit tout ce qui est beau et tout ce qui est bon,' avec cet élément qui est 'le bienfaiteur du genre humain.'⁶⁴ Toutefois, il reste que les Grecs n'ont pas senti le besoin d'instituer des cultes de Gaia/Gê, en lui donnant l'épiclèse de *Mètèr*, de 'Mère.'

Sur un plan plus particulier, maintenant, la terre civique, la cité, le pays, constituent, pour les citoyens, une entité qui les enfante, qui les nourrit, qui les

61 Godart, Sacconi 1996:105.

62 Voir Soph. *Phil.* 391 ss. avec les scholies. Décidément, cette 'Terre-Mère' n'arrive pas à avoir une existence propre. En désaccord avec Vollgraff, Keramopoulos (ci-dessus, note 60) préfère l'identification avec Sémélé. Plus généralement, A. Schachter (1981:226) pense à une équation Déméter/Gê, à Thèbes, en évoquant Eur. *Phoen.* 685-86, et *Bacch.* 275-76. Mais rien ne permet de dire que ce type d'assimilations poétiques fonctionnent aussi sur le plan cultuel.

63 Cf. ci-dessus, note 45.

64 Comme le dit Cyrus, au seuil de la mort: *tou euergetountos anthrôpous* (Xen. *Cyr.* 8.7.25).

accueille, après leur mort, dans son sein. Cette terre, ils la considèrent comme leur ‘mère (μήτηρ), leur ‘nourrice’ (τροφός), mais aussi comme leur *patris*. Elle est ainsi ‘la terre du père/des pères,’ leur ‘terre paternelle,’ mais elle est aussi ‘la terre de la mère,’ leur ‘terre maternelle,’ leur ‘matricie’ (μητρίας), comme l’appellent les Crétois, selon Platon et Plutarque.⁶⁵ Dans ce sens, le mot *patris* est, du point de vue linguistique, l’exact équivalent du mot *mètris*. A ce propos, une remarque s’impose: dans ces passages de Platon et de Plutarque, rien n’indique que ces auteurs considèrent le mot *mètris* comme quelque chose d’étrange et d’exceptionnel, ou qu’ils l’aient employé pour marquer ‘une toute particulière intimité’ des Crétois avec leur pays —comme on le pense parfois.

En fait, Platon et Plutarque mettent, me semble-t-il, les vocables *mètris/patris* sur le même plan. Ils disent, en passant, que *mètris* est un mot employé par les Crétois, mais ils n’en font aucun jugement de valeur. Platon, en considérant le comportement du tyran envers la cité, remarque que, si la cité veut lui résister, alors le tyran, comme il avait jadis maltraité ‘sa mère et son père’ (*mètera kai patera*), asservira ‘celle qui lui fut autrefois chère (*philèn*),⁶⁶ sa matricie, comme disent les Crétois, et patrie (*mètrida te ... kai patrida*) ...’ Quant à Plutarque, il explique que ‘la patrie et matricie (*he de patris kai mètris*), comme l’appellent les Crétois,’ a ‘des droits plus anciens et plus importants que ceux des parents (*goneôn*).’ Cette patrie/matricie—continue Plutarque—vit, bien entendu, longtemps, mais elle n’est ni impérissable, ni autarcique; c’est pourquoi ‘elle a toujours besoin de considération, d’aide, de soins.’ Ainsi, dans ces deux textes, la *mètris/patris* (ou *patris/mètris*), est conçue comme un ensemble, comme une entité à deux aspects, à deux fonctions, maternelle et paternelle, d’autant plus qu’elle est mise en parallèle avec les deux parents (chez Plutarque), ou mieux encore, avec la mère et le père (chez Platon). Dans le même fil d’idées, Isocrate, en faisant l’éloge des ancêtres des Athéniens, dira que ces hommes, ‘les seuls autochtones parmi les Grecs,’ avaient ‘comme nourrice ce pays, d’où ils ont poussé’ (ταύτην ἔχοντας τὴν χώραν τροφόν, ἐξ ἧσπερ ἔφυσαν), et qu’ils aimaient tendrement, exactement comme ‘les meilleurs’ (*hoi beltistoi*) chérissent ‘leurs pères et leurs mères’ (*tous pateras kai tas mèteras*).⁶⁷

Enfin, si les Crétois disaient plutôt *mètris*, d’autres Grecs pouvaient, le cas échéant, employer un autre mot, à savoir, *mèropolis* (littéralement ‘la cité de la

65 Pl. *Resp.* 9.575d; Plut. *An seni* 17, *Mor.* 792 EF.

66 Un peu plus haut, en 574bc, c’est la mère et le père du futur tyran, qui sont qualifiés, respectivement, de *philè* et de *philos*. Cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 670-73, où *gâ*, la terre dont surgissent les Spartes, est appelée *phila*.

67 Isoc. *Panath.* (12) 124-25. Cf. *Soph. Aj.* 515-17, sur cette association entre la patrie, la mère et le père.

mère'), non pas dans le sens de 'métropole,'⁶⁸ la ville considérée par rapport à ses colonies, mais dans celui de 'terre/cité natale,' de 'pays,' de 'patrie.'⁶⁹

Deux mots encore pour conclure, au moins provisoirement. La terre en général et la terre civique en particulier sont des entités complexes, polysémiques, à facettes multiples, où se trouvent impliqués, d'une façon ou d'une autre, le féminin et le masculin, la mère et le père. Lorsqu'on veut faire représenter, tout simplement, ces instances polyvalentes par une déesse nommée 'Terre-Mère,' alors on crée, de toutes pièces, une importante figure divine, on invente le culte d'une Gaia/Gè *Mètèr*, qu'on installe artificiellement au sein de la cité. Mais cette 'Terre-Mère,' vue à travers la lentille agrandissante de certains modernes, reste—au moins pour le moment—introuvable dans les contextes culturels des cités grecques.⁷⁰

Notice complémentaire

Dans ce texte, susceptible de suggérer plutôt quelques orientations, que d'offrir des réponses toutes faites, j'ai voulu, entre autres, mettre l'accent sur la fonction *surtout* nourricière et 'kourotrophique' de la terre, fonction qui m'a parue être mise en avant par les Anciens eux-mêmes. C'est dans cette perspective que j'aimerais reconsidérer brièvement une fameuse phrase du *Ménéxène*, qui ne cesse d'agiter les esprits des modernes. Mais pour la commodité de la lecture, il serait préférable de citer tout le passage comportant cette phrase litigieuse (que je mets en caractères italiques).

Après avoir vanté la terre attique comme étant celle qui, parmi les êtres vivants, 'choisit et engendra l'être humain (*anthrôpon*),' Socrate poursuit (Pl. *Menex.* 237d -238a; j'essaie de traduire au plus près du texte):

'Or il y a une grande preuve (*mega tekmerion*) en faveur de ce qui vient d'être dit, [à savoir] que c'est cette terre qui a enfanté (*eteken*) les ancêtres de ces morts et [qui sont aussi] les nôtres. Car tout ce qui enfante (*pan to tekon*) possède une nourriture (*trophèn*) appropriée à ce qu'il enfante, et c'est précisément par cela qu'une femme donne à voir (*dèlè*) qu'elle a enfanté véritablement (*alèthôs*) ou non, mais [dans ce dernier cas] elle suppose un

68 Dans ce sens *cf.*, par exemple, Pind. *Pyth.* 4.20 (Théra, comme *matropolis* de grandes cités); Thuc. 1.24 *etc.*

69 *Cf.* Pind. *Nem.* 5.7-8 (11-12), avec les scholies: Égine, en tant que pays des Aiakidai, fils ou descendants d'Éaque, roi d'Égine; Soph. *OC* 707: Athènes, appelée par le chœur *matropolis*. Soph. *Ant.* 1122: Thèbes, qualifiée de 'cité natale des Bacchantes' (Βακχῶν ματρόπολιν Θήβων). C'est, sans doute, sur ce mot que le comique Antiphanès forgera le terme *patropolis* (fr. 219, Kassel - Austin = 220, Kock, *ap.* Ath. 3.100d).

70 Après maintes recherches, on pourrait sans doute trouver une dédicace à la Terre Mère, comme celle qu'a faite un légionnaire romain, dans la lointain Arménie (vers 150-200): *SEG*, 42.1992:n° 1322 (Γῆς Μητρ[ί]ς Ὀλυβρι θεῶν δεσποίνῃς); mais ce type de dédicaces individuelles, à supposer qu'on en découvre, n'est pas de nature à modifier les données du problème.

enfant (*hupoballomenè*), si elle ne possède pas de sources de nourriture pour l'être né. Et c'est cela que notre terre qui est aussi notre mère fournit comme une suffisante preuve (*hikanon tekmerion*) de ce qu'elle a engendré des êtres humains (*anthrôpous*): car seule en ce temps-là et la première, elle a porté comme nourriture [faite] pour les humains (*trophèn anthrôpeian*) le fruit du blé et de l'orge, avec lequel se nourrit de la façon la plus belle et la meilleure le genre humain, [ce qui montre] qu'elle a réellement (*tôi onti*) engendré elle-même cet être.⁷¹ Or, c'est plutôt (*mallon*) pour la terre que pour la femme qu'il convient d'accepter de telles preuves; car ce n'est pas la terre qui a imité la femme dans la grossesse et l'enfantement, mais la femme la terre.'

Cette dernière phrase a été souvent analysée et interprétée en termes 'agricoles'.⁷² Réagissant à ce type d'interprétation, Nicole Loraux⁷³ a souligné l'absence de tout vocabulaire 'agricole,' dans cette phrase, et a remarqué que, de toute façon, 'ce développement du *Ménéxène* ne comporte aucune allusion à un père, celui-ci fût-il simplement "sèmeur."' N. Loraux pense que cette phrase tourne autour de la 'rivalité entre la femme et la terre pour le titre de toute-puissante reproductrice.' En affirmant l'antériorité de la terre, on aurait voulu signifier 'que les premiers accouchements furent ceux de la Terre' primordiale et, par conséquent, la femme ne saurait être installée qu'en 'position d'imitatrice' par rapport à la grossesse et la reproduction (Loraux 1996:132, 135).

Je n'exclue pas que l'on puisse déceler, derrière cette phrase, des considérations sur l'antériorité procréative de la terre, ou encore sur l'évincion de la femme et de la maternité féminine du temps des origines. Un texte de cette nature ne saurait être que polysémique. Il serait donc erroné de 'le réduire à un énoncé,' comme le remarque très justement Nicole Loraux. Cependant, le problème, me semble-t-il, que posent souvent les textes grecs, c'est de pouvoir discerner, chaque fois, où mettent-ils l'accent.

Dans ce passage du *Ménéxène*, ce qui compte, à mon sens, ce n'est pas tellement la question de la présence ou non d'un engendreur, ou le problème de la priorité temporelle quant à la conception et la génération, ou encore le 'dogme de la parthénogénèse' par rapport à la reproduction sexuée. Ce qui semble ressortir, en première ligne, de ce texte, c'est surtout le thème de la *trophè*, de la nourriture. Or,

71 A ce propos, cf. un passage très significatif de la *Rhétorique* d'Aristote (1.2.1357b14-17): 'Mais si l'on disait par exemple: un indice (*sêmeion*) qu'il est malade, c'est qu'il a de la fièvre, ou: un indice qu'elle a enfanté (*tetoken*), c'est qu'elle a du lait, un tel indice serait nécessaire (*anagkaion*). Parmi les indices, c'est le seul qui soit une preuve (*tekmerion*); car c'est le seul, à condition qu'il soit vrai, que l'on ne puisse réfuter.'

72 Comme l'exprime, par exemple, J.-P. Vernant (1974:189-90), 'le ventre de la femme, que l'homme doit besogner pour y déposer sa semence, s'il veut avoir des enfants, est semblable au ventre de la terre, que l'homme doit labourer s'il veut avoir du blé Comme le dit Platon, la femme imite la terre dans la grossesse et l'enfantement (*Menex.* 238a).'

73 Voir tout particulièrement le chapitre 'Pourquoi les mères grecques imitent, à ce qu'on dit, la terre,' dans Loraux 1996:128-44.

c'est justement sur ce point, à savoir sur la question de la *trophè*, que s'opère, à mon avis, la comparaison entre la terre et la femme. Car si, pour prouver qu'on a enfanté, on doit montrer sa capacité de posséder, de produire, 'une nourriture appropriée à ce qu'on enfante,' alors, c'est sûrement la terre ou, plus précisément la terre attique, qui l'emporte par rapport à la femme. En effet, dit Socrate, 'notre terre et mère' nous a fourni une 'grande preuve,' une 'preuve suffisante' du fait qu'elle a engendré des humains. Car elle était la *seule* et la *première*, 'en ce temps-là' (*en tòi tote*), à produire une nourriture pour les humains (littéralement: 'une nourriture humaine').

La terre attique a donc prouvé indiscutablement qu'elle est digne *trophos* de ses enfants,⁷⁴ ce qui n'est pas forcément le cas avec la femme. En effet, il y a des femmes qui montrent qu'elles sont capables de nourrir leur rejeton, qu'elles portent en elles la nourriture qui lui convient; celles-là, on peut, *par ce fait*, les considérer comme des vraies mères. Mais il peut en avoir d'autres qui ne possèdent pas ces ressources nécessaires pour élever leur enfant; alors celles-là ne mériteraient pas le nom de la mère: le manque de la *trophè* adéquate prouve qu'elles n'ont pas réellement enfanté.

En résumant, je dirais que, dans le *Ménéxène*, la terre ne se présente pas tellement comme la mère originelle, comme une 'toute-puissante reproductrice,' ou comme un champ auquel la femme doit s'identifier, 'dans sa fonction procréatrice,' un champ qui a besoin d'un *arotèr*, d'un 'laboureur.'⁷⁵ Dans ce texte, la terre apparaît surtout comme le *modèle nourricier* par excellence, un modèle que la femme a imité et continue d'imiter, dans la grossesse et l'enfantement. Tout ce joue donc autour de la production de la *trophè*, ce qui expliquerait sans doute l'absence, dans ce passage, de 'tout principe masculin.'

Quant à cette *trophè* 'propre aux humains,' il n'y a rien dans le texte qui nous permette de la réduire au seul blé, voire à 'l'épi de blé d'Éleusis,' en l'associant à Déméter et aux mystères éleusiniennes.⁷⁶ Cette *trophè* est représentée par les deux principales céréales, le blé et l'orge, mais pas seulement. Car plus tard, c'est l'huile que la terre attique a fait naître et produit pour ses fils (*ekgonois* : *Menex.* 238 a). Dans sa grande générosité, la terre attique se révèle décidément comme la meilleure des nourrices.⁷⁷

74 Cf. la répétition, dans le *Ménéxène*, du verbe *trephô* par rapport à la fonction nourricière de la terre attique: *trephomenous* (237b), *threpsasès* (237c), *threpsamenè* (238b).

75 Ainsi que d'autres textes peuvent le suggérer, voire le dire (cf. Vernant 1985:171 s.).

76 Cf., dans ce sens, L. Robin (ci-dessus note 49, vol. i, 1313); Loraux 1996:133, 140.

77 Je ne crois pas que ce texte du *Ménéxène* puisse être éclairé par un passage des *Propos de table* (2.3. *Mor.* 638A), où Plutarque reprend la phrase en question: 'car ce n'est pas la terre,' dit Platon, 'qui imite (*mimètai*) la femme, mais la femme la terre.' Le contexte n'est pas du tout le même, et la *gê* de Plutarque (la terre en général, à la naissance du *kosmos*) n'est pas la terre attique dont parle le *Ménéxène*. Par ailleurs, comme le remarque, à juste titre, Fr. Fuhrmann, dans l'édition de ce traité de Plutarque (*Coll. Univ. Fr.*, notes complémentaires, p. 183), cette 'citation est introduite d'une façon bien artificielle.'—Je dois un grand merci à mon amie Catherine Darbo-Peschanski, pour ses remarques judicieuses et sa disponibilité.

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Odysseus versus the Cyclops

Jan. N. Bremmer

MONSTERS HAVE probably always been with us. They are so good for exploring the margins of civilisation that they must have been invented in very early times. Indeed, male and female monsters are already present in the oldest poems of the Western world, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer. In the ninth book of the *Odyssey* Homer describes how Odysseus landed on the island of the Cyclopes.¹ With his comrades he visited the cave of one of them, Polyphemus, who locked the Greeks in and started to have them for dinner. In the end Odysseus managed to get him drunk, told him that his name was 'Nobody,' blinded his one eye and escaped underneath the Cyclops' sheep with his surviving comrades. The monstrous Cyclops has often fascinated scholars and the episode has regularly been analysed. Unlike most other Homeric episodes, though, variants of this one have been found in countries as far apart as France, Turkey and Estonia. Their unexpected presence is the reason that the following analysis will not limit itself to Homer, but will also look at the folkloric parallels. Subsequently, we will try to answer the following questions. First, what is the connection with the variants of the story outside Greece (§ 1)? Secondly, who were the Cyclopes according to Greek tradition (§ 2)? And finally, are there narrative or ritual traditions behind the figure of Polyphemus and his cannibalistic activities (§ 3)? Let us start with the non-Homeric variants.

1. *The travelling Cyclops*

After Homer, the story of the Cyclops immediately became popular and we find already early representations in numerous places outside Attica, the main producer of ancient Greek vase paintings (Touchefeu-Meynier 1992:1017). In fact, the story was so popular that during the Roman Empire people even dreamt of the Cyclops or his cave (Artem. 1.5, 26). But similar stories to Homer's have also been re-

¹ The most helpful studies of the Cyclopes in general are Brelich 1958:332-36; Detienne, Vernant 1978:75-87; Auffarth 1991:292-344; Touchefeu-Meynier 1992.

corded by modern folklorists, and in an analysis of Odysseus' encounter with Polyphemus Walter Burkert uses these tales as independent evidence to explain the motif of the escape underneath the ram.² Is such an approach justified?

It is now nearly two hundred years since scholars started to note folklore versions of the Polyphemus episode. The discovery seems to have been made first by the German scholar H.F. von Diez (1751-1817), who had been Prussian *chargé d'affaires* in Constantinople. In 1815 he discovered in the Royal Dresden Library a sixteenth-century manuscript with a collection of unknown Turkish stories, *The Book of Dede Korkut*. The stories are situated in the heroic age of the Turkish tribe of the Oghuz, who in the eleventh century became the most important power in what later would be the Ottoman empire, but they were probably recorded around 1400 in North-East Anatolia.³ To his surprise Von Diez read the following story:

A Cyclops-like figure terrorised the land of the Oghuz, who invoked the help of their seer Dede Korkut. He persuaded the monster to be satisfied with two persons and 500 sheep a day. When a mother had to give up her second, last son, she went to the great Oghuz hero Basat, who finally agreed to get rid of the monster. The 'Cyclops' pushed Basat's arrows away like flies, grabbed the hero and put him into his boot. When Basat had liberated himself, he put a spit into his eye and left his cave wrapped in the skin of a ram.

The 'Cyclops' did give him a ring, but Basat killed him shortly afterwards.⁴ Von Diez recognised that this episode was inspired by Odysseus' confrontation with Polyphemus and only fifty years later the lesser known of the Grimm brothers, Wilhelm (1786-1859), had already collected ten more versions, among which some came from Northern Europe (Grimm 1857). About a century later there appeared the first monograph, with 221 variants from all over the world, and the industry of modern folklorists has since added many more.⁵

Wilhelm Grimm thought that the versions of the Estonians, Finns, Greeks,⁶ and other peoples all derived from the same primeval original and that it was irrelevant that those from Northern Europe had been noted down more than 2500 years after Homer. Many later folklorists equally did not concern themselves with the precise chronology determination of their versions. Apparently, the romantic idea of the people as the carrier of age-old traditions made such questions superfluous. Moreover, the folklore versions often contained additional motifs which

2 Burkert 1979:33; similarly, Calame 1995:139-73. Burkert 1987:46 is more careful: '... a widespread type of folktale which, even if it were ultimately dependent on some *Odyssey*, owed its success to its intrinsic structure and dynamics, and not to special poetical skill.'

3 Diez 1815; Spies 1981 (date).

4 Lewis 1974:140-50. The exact date of the individual tales is impossible to establish.

5 Hackman 1904; Burkert 1979:156 note 13 (with earlier bibliography); Naumann 1979.

6 But the Greek parallels are not impressive: Faure 1967 and 1970; Imellos 1984.

made them appear to be independent from the Homeric version. A good example is the oldest version recorded in Western Europe and already noted by Wilhelm Grimm. In his *Dolopathos* (ca. 1190) the Cistercian monk Johannes from Alta Silva in the Lorraine relates the following story:

Robbers had heard that a giant (*gigas*) possessed a great amount of gold. They decided to rob him but were taken prisoner. The giant immediately selected the fattest among them to be cooked alive. After him all the robbers were eaten until the story-teller, who was forced to participate in the cannibalism, was the last one left. Through a trick he managed to blind the giant, but he could not escape until he had wrapped himself into the skin of a ram and thus got free. The giant gave him a ring, which forced him to betray his position. That is why the giant could continuously trace him until he cut off the finger with the ring.⁷

Unfortunately, in a second robber adventure Johannes tells that the name of the cannibal was Polyphemus. So, directly or indirectly, he had derived his story from a text of Homer. But how? The learned monk had some knowledge of Greek mythology and even of Greek itself, as illustrated by his explanation of the title: *Dolopathos: id est dolum vel dolorem patiens, ex greco latinoque sermone compositum* (4.7-8).⁸ However, by the time of Johannes, the Greek text of Homer was no longer known (Kullmann 1988): after the fall of the Roman Empire knowledge of Greek had disappeared fairly quickly in the West, and even scholars such as Isidore of Seville or the Venerable Bede had only a superficial and defective knowledge of Greek;⁹ what remained known of Greek was chiefly based on Greek and Latin parallel texts of the Bible and Greek-Latin wordlists.¹⁰ Theoretically, Johannes could somehow have learned of the story via the Latin tradition, since Odysseus' encounter is told in detail by the mythographer Hyginus (*Fab.* 125), but this is not very likely. Hyginus was not a popular author: the one manuscript to survive the Middle Ages was written around AD 900 in Beneventan script and its fragments have been discovered only in Bavaria.¹¹ Given that Johannes is also the first Western author to use motifs from the *Book of Sindebad*, it is more attractive to think of a Crusader or pilgrim to the Holy Land via Byzantium as his (ultimate?) source, but other possibilities such as merchants can of course not be excluded (Fehling 1977:89-97, 1986:191-207). In any case, the knowledge of the Homeric Cyclops must have been fairly recent, since a Homeric colouring is still absent from the account of the Cyclopes with their *unum oculum* in the *Liber monstrorum* (ca. AD

7 Hilka 1913:73-75, tr. Gilleland 1981:64-66. Cutting of finger: Burkert 1996:37-40.

8 For Johannes' erudition see Gilleland 1978; Maaz 1993.

9 Berschin 1980; Noble 1985; Berschin 1985; Kaczynski 1988; Herren 1988.

10 See, in addition to Berschin 1980, 1985, especially Aerts 1985, 1995 and 1996; Osborne 1990.

11 Reeve 1983. For other possibilities see Herren 1999, an excellent survey.

900), which is nearly literally based on an episode from *Aeneid* III (588ff) and does not betray the slightest familiarity with the *Odyssey* (1.11: Bologna 1977:46). Neither, somewhat later, does Adam of Bremen (d. ca. 1081) in his *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg*, who only mentions the giant size and abnormally blood-thirsty dogs of the Cyclopes (4.41).

The *Dolopathos* is not unique in betraying literary influence. For example, a Sicilian fairy tale calls the giant Ciclopu (Pitré 1875, no. 71) and in an Icelandic version the two heroes (monks in this case) remark that in Latin the giant is called *monoculus* (Settegast 1917:7). Admittedly, most of the folklore versions miss the Homeric 'Nobody' episode and have added a scene with the ring similar to the one in the *Dede Korkut* version, but it is hardly to be doubted that directly or indirectly they all ultimately derive from Homer.¹²

That conclusion was not the one always drawn by folklorists. In more recent times, one of them noted that various features of medieval versions of the Polyphemus episode occurred on Greek vases but were absent from Homer: Cyclopes with two or three eyes (below, § 3), more Odyssean comrades than are mentioned in the *Odyssey*, and the roasting by Polyphemus of one of Odysseus' comrades instead of eating him raw.¹³ Yet it would go much too far to deduce from these variants, as folklorists do, that they point to an independent oral tradition which for two millennia went underground and only emerged during the Crusades. All these differences can easily be explained as variations by an artist who knows how to make a familiar story interesting to his audience.

In fact, in recent years it has become increasingly clear that the oral tradition is highly vulnerable. Only when a story is connected with a rite, a certain object (such as a statue or a ruin) or an activity of vital importance for the community (§ 3), may we expect archaic traditions to survive relatively unchanged over a long period of time.¹⁴ Classical motifs in modern fairy tales invariably turn out to be derived from literary influences:¹⁵ we must never forget that Western Europe remained exposed to Greek myth because of the popularity of Ovid in the Latin school curriculum (Burkert 1984).

12 As was already observed by Meuli 1976:639-40 (1921¹).

13 Röhrich 1976:234-52, 326-28 ('Die mittelalterlichen Redaktionen des Polyphem-Märchens und ihr Verhältnis zur ausserhomerischen Tradition').

14 Note also the view of the influential early modern historian Keith Thomas 1986: 120-1: 'Authentic oral tradition, unaffected by any written text, is never easy to find.'

15 As has been persuasively argued by Fehling 1977:89-97 and 1984:79-92; Moser 1979. It is curious but typical that this discussion has been completely ignored by Hansen 1997.

2. *The Cyclopes in and outside Homer*

Let us now turn to the Greek tradition. Recent research has increasingly realised that Homer was an independent poet who regularly, to a larger or smaller extent, modified pre-existing traditions in order to fit them into his own epics.¹⁶ In order to find out whether Homer has done so also in the case of the Cyclopes, we will first look at the non-Homeric tradition. The oldest certain mention of Cyclopes outside Homer occurs in that mine of mythological information, Hesiod's *Theogony*. He tells that they were like the gods (142) and that their works displayed 'strength and powers of invention' (146). Both these qualities appear in the Cyclopean tradition. When after ten years Zeus' battle against the Titans still proved unsuccessful, the goddess Ge (Earth) predicted victory if Zeus would release 'the Cyclopes who had been hurled down into the Tartarus' by their father Ouranos for reasons obscure to us. So Zeus killed their 'gaoleress Kampe' and in gratitude the Cyclopes forged his thunder, flash and lightning-bolt, and in addition a helmet of invisibility for Hades and the trident for Poseidon.¹⁷ Our source, the late mythographer Apollodorus, seems to derive this episode, directly or more probably indirectly, from a lost Archaic epic, the *Titanomachy*, but he also follows Hesiod, who gives as the names of the Cyclopes: Brontes, 'Thunder,' Steropes, 'Lightner,' and Arges, 'Flash' (140).¹⁸ Given their early role as smiths, it is not surprising that mythographers (historians?) related that the Cyclopes were the first to make weapons in a Euboean cave, Teuchion (*P Oxy.* 10.1241). This primacy is confirmed by the Hellenistic historian Istros, according to whom they were the inventors of weapons in bronze (*FGrH* 334 fr. 71). Orphic poets even stated that the Cyclopes instructed Hephaistus and Athena in the art of casting statues (*Orph. frs.* 178-80 Kern). The Cyclopes were out of place in the 'new order' instituted by Zeus: they belonged to the divine generation before Zeus and they practised the dangerous activity of making weapons. That is probably why according to an early tradition Apollo killed them or, according to a later and 'softer' version, their sons.¹⁹ However, later poets did not want the Cyclopes to disappear from the mythological scene altogether and made them into helpers of Hephaistos. They settled them in the volcanic area of Sicily or adjacent islands, and as assistants of the divine smith they became popular in Roman art; as such they were even occasionally alluded to in later inscriptions with literary pretensions.²⁰

16 See for a good introduction to this problem Rutherford 1996:1-8.

17 Hes. *Theog.* 504-5; Apollod. 1.1.2 and 2.1, 3.10.4; see also Pind. fr. 266 Maehler; Nollé 1993:no. 3.

18 Pherec. *FGrH* 3 fr. 46 also mentions a Cyclops named Aortes; Hyg. *Fab.* 157 a Euphemus, which H.J. Rose in his edition (1933) unnecessarily changed into Polyphemus.

19 Pherec. *FGrH* 3 fr. 35a; Eratosth. [*Cat.*] 29; Apollod. 3.10.4; Hyg. *Fab.* 49 (sons).

20 Helpers: Eur. *Cyc.* 20; Thuc. 6.2; Callim. *Hymn* 3.46ff; Nisbet and Hubbard on Hor. *Carm.* 1.4.7; add *PMich.* 760. Roman art: Touchefeu-Meynier 1992:nos. 32-41. Inscriptions: *SEG* 30.1254, 34.1308.

Given that forging iron requires physical strength, it is understandable that the Cyclopes were also considered to have been giants, as immediately after Hesiod and Homer the Spartan poet Tyrtaeus mentioned their 'size and strength' (12.3) and a later tradition ascribed to them the building of the first altar. In view of their negative characterisation overall, it is not surprising that this feat is recorded only once. On the other hand, early traditions ascribed imposing buildings to the Cyclopes, such as the walls of Mycene and Tiryns, and as builders they remained famous all through antiquity.²¹

However impressive these activities may seem to us, the Greek upper-classes looked down upon those who had to work for a living. That is why Sophocles referred to the artisan Daedalus as 'living by his hands' (fr. 164a Radt) and why the Cyclopes were disparagingly named 'Bellyhands,' a description already existing in the fifth century and lending further support to the antiquity of the 'building' tradition.²²

Do these mythological representations also in some way reflect a historical reality? Hesiod mentions only three Cyclopes and later notices do not give the impression of a larger group either. In fact, a group of smiths is not unique in Greek mythology. Similar groups of people who are closely associated with iron working and similarly abnormal in their physical appearance have been reported for the island of Rhodes, where the local smiths, the Telchines, were represented as half-man, half-seal, and for Crete, where the smiths of Mt Ida were called Daktyloi, 'Tom Thumbs'—smiths could evidently be represented larger or smaller than normal people.²³ Such representations may look strange to us, but all over the world the smith was a kind of outsider, whose work placed him outside the normal activities of hunting or agriculture.²⁴ It is clearly this marginal position that led to these 'monstrous' representations. The consistency with which smiths are represented as groups also suggests that early Greek smiths did not work alone. However, the mythological imagination tends to simplify real life in order to make the narrative more effective. It may well be that iron working groups consisted of more than three workers, but we have no evidence to decide the point.

In Homer we encounter a different kind of Cyclops. When Odysseus lands in the land of the Cyclopes, it initially looks as if he has disembarked in a land of

21 Pind. fr. 169a.7 Maehler; Bacchyl. 11.77; Pherec. *FGrH* 3 fr. 12; Soph. fr. 227 Radt; Eur. *HF* 15, *IA* 1499; Hellanicus *FGrH* 4 fr. 88; Eratosth. [*Cat.*] 39 (altar); Verg. *Aen.* 6.631; Strabo 8.6.8; Apollod. 2.2.1; Paus. 2.25.8; *Anth. Pal.* 7.748; schol. on Eur. *Or.* 965; *Et. Magnum* 213.29; Eust. *Il.* p. 286.21.

22 R. Kassel and C. Austin on Nikophon F 6-12; Lloyd-Jones and Parsons on Antimachus 77 SH; Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1959:272: 'offenbar aus altionischer Mythographie.'

23 Detienne, Vernant 1978:244-6, 254-5; Dasen 1993:196-97; Graf 1999.

24 Eliade 1971; Margarido, Germain-Wasserman 1972; Marold 1973; Hauck 1977.

Cockaigne. Here nature supplies everything without human effort, since the Cyclopes need not sow or plough (108-9). But the initial impression soon proves to be deceptive, since the lushness of nature is just one more sign of the absence of a normal human community.²⁵ In fact, the Cyclopes have no political institutions or laws (106, 112), and do not live in houses but in caves (113-5), a kind of habitation normally only ascribed in Greece to its primeval inhabitants or to faraway peoples.²⁶ Moreover, they are unfamiliar with commerce (127ff), agriculture (134) and ships (136). In the light of this absence of civilisation, it is not surprising that they are called 'arrogant' (106).

Within this uncivilised community Polyphemos is even less civilised. He is 'monstrously tall' (187, 191) and has a 'thundering voice' (257). His cave is situated far away from the other caves; he never goes to visit other shepherds with his herd (188); he always eats alone,²⁷ and he does not 'rule' over a wife and children (115, 188). Moreover, he distinguishes himself from the civilised Odysseus by his culinary behaviour. He is not only a cannibal, but even an uncivilised one, since each day he smashes some of Odysseus' comrades against the ground 'like young dogs' (!) and evidently consumes them raw (289).²⁸ In addition to this ignorance about the proper way of preparing meat, the Cyclops is also ignorant of the right way of drinking, since Odysseus can make him drunk by supplying him with exquisite wine. For the Greeks wine mixed with water was *the* drink par excellence and neighbouring peoples were regularly represented as either drinkers of milk or as ignorant of the right way of drinking wine, correctly diluted with water.²⁹ It is now hardly surprising that Polyphemos even lacks the most elementary qualities of normal human life, piety and hospitality (272ff).

It is part of Homer's art that he does not stress the monstrous appearance of the Cyclopes.³⁰ Admittedly, he does tell that Polyphemos is a giant and thus able to throw rocks (481), but he does not explicitly mention that the Cyclopes have only one eye.³¹ However, this is the implication of Odysseus' blinding Polyphemos by putting a red-hot stake (below) into only one eye. The physical description is only partly mirrored by the vase-painters. They clearly try to picture him as a hairy giant, but there are very few early representations of a one-eyed Cyclops; most vases

25 In Greek culture lushness of nature is never a good sign, cf. Gould 1987.

26 Buxton 1994:104-08; Buxton 1990; Siebert 1990.

27 See also Braund 1995; for some more examples, Bremmer 1999²a:46-7. For *monophage* ('solitary eater') as insult see Ar. *Ve.* 923; Amipsias fr. 23 K.-A.

28 For the Greek view of cannibalism see most recently Hughes 1991:188; Buxton 1994:200.

29 Graf 1980; Marzullo 1995-96:177-78.

30 *Contra* Burkert 1995:149, who suggests that Homer simply forgot to mention the detail.

31 This was already noted by Accius *apud* Gellius 3.11.5.

give him two, and several, mostly later ones, even three eyes.³² Still in Euripides' *Cyclops* Polyphemus sometimes seems to be depicted as having two eyes, sometimes one eye (Seaford 1984:100), although Cratinus calls him *monommatos* (F 156 K.-A.).³³

In Greek mythology, the nature of mythological figures is often determined not only by their activities but also by their genealogy. Whereas the Hesiodic Cyclopes are children of Ouranos and Gaia, the father of Polyphemus was Poseidon (Gellius 15.21.1). In pre-Homeric times the later god of the sea had occupied a more important position in the Greek pantheon. Apparently, he had originally been closely connected with the world of the warrior, including initiation. In this context he was also associated with macho and monstrous figures, such as Kaineus and Kerkyon.³⁴

When we now compare the Homeric representation of the Cyclopes with the mythical tradition outside Homer, it is clear that besides their name and giant appearance Homer has borrowed very little else from the Cyclopean tradition. This difference already caused problems in antiquity and as early as the fifth-century mythographer Hellanicus the solution was looked for in different kinds of Cyclopes, a solution also adapted by modern scholarship.³⁵ This seems unnecessary. There is no reason to deny Homer the skill of invention and adaptation, as more recent scholarship has started to recognise (above). Instead of depicting the traditional activity of the Cyclopes, Homer has transformed the one marginal activity, that of smiths, into another one, better suited to the narrative, that of herdsmen: Polyphemus tends his lambs (277f) and he makes cheese (240f). Does that mean that Homer completely neglects their iron working activities? Perhaps not. When Odysseus puts the red-hot stake into Polyphemus' eye, Homer compares the foaming blood with the boiling water in which a smith cools a big axe or a hatchet. Would it be too far-fetched to see in this comparison also a subtle reference to the iron working activities of the Cyclopes?

In his analysis of Odysseus' confrontation with Polyphemus, to which we will turn next, Walter Burkert (1979:31) writes that he would immediately forget the details of the Cyclopean life, if he ever had to memorise this story. I am sure this is true, since *we* are fascinated by the confrontation proper, but this makes it all the more important not to neglect Homer's picture which was evidently important to *him*. It is not difficult to recognise in his enumeration of all these details the robust

32 Touchefeu-Meynier 1992:nos. 17-31, 1997:1017. For a possible Near Eastern origin of the one-eyed monster see Knox 1979; Poljakov 1983.

33 For Polyphemus in the *Cyclops* see now Mastromarco 1998.

34 Poseidon: Bremmer 1987, 2001. Kaineus: LIMC. Kerkyon: Choerilus fr. 1 Snell-Kannicht.

35 Hellanicus *FGrH* 4 fr. 88; A. Heubeck on *Od.* 9.106-15.

self-confidence of a civilisation which is proud of its achievements and looks down on those who have not yet reached that level of refinement. It is exactly the mentality we would expect at the beginning of the Archaic Age when colonisation brought the Greeks into contact with all kinds of foreign and often less developed peoples. Homer, then, very much depicts the Cyclopes as Victorian authors depicted 'savages'.³⁶

3. *A pre-existing story?*

If Homer hardly used the original Cyclopean tradition, the question becomes legitimate whether he perhaps drew upon other traditions originally unconnected with the Cyclopes. This is the direction taken by Walter Burkert in his challenging observations on Polyphemus. According to Burkert, in his portrayal of the Cyclops Homer drew on a primeval mythological tradition, even older than the birth of the very first Indo-European community. Burkert approached the problem by putting the question whether there exists a parallel to a giant, who lives far away in a cave and tends a large herd of cattle. If put in this way, the question is not difficult to answer. As Burkert (1979:33) saw, there is only one figure who fits this description: the Lord of the Animals.

Virtually all hunting peoples on earth appear once to have worshipped a divine figure who was considered to be the owner of the game. This Lord or Lady of the Animals looked after the animals and prevented hunters from hunting more than was necessary. In addition to the more general Lord or Lady of all the animals, there were also Lords or Ladies of different kinds of animals, included those of the sea. It is amazing that descendants of this figure, which so clearly belongs to the vanished world of the hunting peoples, could maintain themselves in conservative and once more remote areas of Europe, such as Switzerland and the Tirol, until last century, witness the following Tirolian tradition about certain giants:

They (the giants) protected the singing birds, ... and sheep; hunters were even forbidden to kill the first category. They opened the stables to sheep which had been kept indoors too long, set free badly treated cattle and punished cruel people through avalanches. They cried for sheep with fatal accidents.³⁷

Given the persistence of this tradition in Western Europe, it is hardly surprising that we also find its offshoots in ancient Greece. As has often been seen, among the gods Artemis, especially, and Pan incorporated elements of the Lord or Lady of the Animals complex.³⁸ Among heroes, it is the enigmatic figure of Heracles in whose

36 For the contrast between Odysseus and the Cyclopes see also Calame 1977a, 1977b; Vidal-Naquet 1983:39-68; Calame 1985:157-60; O'Sullivan 1990; Auffarth 1991:292-344.

37 I quote from the splendid study of the Lord of the Animals in Western Europe by Röhrich 1976:142-95; further bibliography, Bremmer 1983:129.

myths the Lord of the Animals stayed alive. Time and again he is pictured as the hero who manages to steal cattle from a monster living far away in a cave. His most famous opponent is probably Geryon, who lives on Erytheia, the 'Red Island,' even beyond Okeanos, and in Greece various herds of cattle were said to descend from Geryon's original herd; according to Roman myth, he also robbed the cattle from Cacus.³⁹ Burkert persuasively connects these raids of Heracles with rituals in which shamans of primitive hunting peoples acted out a fight with the Lord or Lady of the Animals in order to take possession of the precious game. This shamanistic origin does not of course mean that Heracles himself once was a shaman. Apparently, the myths continued to be handed down because of the continuing importance of game and in Archaic times they became clustered round Heracles, the most powerful Greek hero.

Already in the last century the resemblance between the myths of Heracles and Indian Visvarupa had been noticed. In the *brahmanas* it is told how Indra killed this demon, whose name means 'of many shapes,' and liberated the cattle he had hidden in his cave. Burkert compared this Visvarupa with one of Heracles' opponents, Periklymenos, the 'very famous,' who, thanks to his father Poseidon,⁴⁰ could change himself in all kinds of shapes until Heracles shot him in the shape of a bee and liberated the cattle of Neleus from his cave (Burkert 1979:86).

If we combine Periklymenos' characteristics—Poseidon, cattle and his name—we seem to come very close to Polyphemus. Burkert thinks that Polyphemus derived his name 'The very famous' from the fame of the story. If that would have been the case, the Cyclops should have had a different name first. This seems highly improbable, since in Greek myth poets hardly ever changed the name of their main protagonists; changing names were left to wives and minor figures. It seems more likely that the name of Polyphemus is a calque on that of Periklymenos. Just like Periklymenos, the Cyclops is a non-human figure, the owner of a large herd, living in a cave, 'very famous,' and closely associated with Poseidon, his father. Moreover, the land of the Cyclopes is close to that of the gods (*Od.* 7.206), just as the shamans had to fetch their game from the *Jenseits* and Heracles had to travel to the Far West. Burkert, then, seems rightly to have recognised the figure of the Lord of the Animals in the background of Polyphemus.

Burkert also considers another element of the confrontation as referring to pre-historic times. According to him, Odysseus could have blinded Polyphemos with a sword instead of behaving like Palaeolithic man and hardening a stake made from Polyphemos' club in the fire. However, it seems very unlikely that this ele-

38 Artemis: Burkert 1985:149f. Pan: Borgeaud 1979:100-1.

39 Geryon: Burkert 1979:83-5. Cacus: Bremmer, Horsfall 1987:53.

40 Eur. *Phoen.* 1156-7; Apollod. 3.6.8; Hyg. *Fab.* 157; schol. on Pind. *Nem.* 9.57a.

ment of the myth eventually reaches back into prehistory. First, the invention of weapons or tools is rarely a theme in hunting myths (Bauer 1993). Secondly, the blinding of Polyphemus is nowhere part of the myths and stories surrounding the Lords and Ladies of the Animals. There is therefore no narrative tradition to support Burkert's suggestion. Thirdly, hardening of spears by fire was still very common in the time of Homer and later periods. It was a technique available to those who had no iron tools, such as less developed peoples like Libyans and Mysians (Her. 7.71, 74), barbarians like the Germans or the poor, such as the followers of Cataline; in fact, Vergil frequently associates it with peasants or mentions it as a make-shift weapon.⁴¹ On the other hand, the use of fire to harden Polyphemus' club once again distinguishes the civilised Greek from the 'savage' Cyclops. A club was typical for those at the margin of civilised society, like Heracles, and remained so well into the Middle Ages (Widengren 1953:93). By using fire, Odysseus favourably distinguishes himself from the Cyclops, who possessed only a 'natural' weapon and did not even use fire for his meals.⁴²

The cannibalistic activities of Polyphemus may also be suggestive. In 1923 the French folklorist Pierre Saintyves (1870-1935) published a study of the fairy tales of Perrault, in which on the basis of *Tom Thumb* he postulated that those tales in which a cannibalistic giant keeps children or young men prisoner once were connected with rites of initiation. Those African tales which he quoted as proof do indeed refer to rituals, but this is not the case with the fairy tales of Perrault, which mostly derive from literary sources (Dekker 1983). But if this example is not very persuasive, the connection of some fairy tales with rites of initiation was also argued by the famous Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp and has been accepted by the authoritative *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*.⁴³

A typical example of such fairy tales, which has not been yet cited in this context, was recorded in the Caucasus in 1913:

A king was unable to have children until he met a stranger who gave him an apple cut in two. By eating the parts his wife would get sons, of whom the stranger would request one. When the sons grew up, the stranger indeed returned and took one boy with him. He educated him into a strong young man. One day, the youth heard from one of the houses in his neighbourhood a voice which told him that each day his educator consumed a prisoner from that house. Through a ruse the youth managed to let his educator fall into the big kettle in which he cooked his prisoners. He opened the houses and the prisoners appeared all to be *young men*. During two days

41 Tac. *Ann.* 2.14 (Germans); Sall. fr. 87 (Cataline); Verg. *Aen.* 7.506 and 524, 11.894, 12.298; Prop. 4.1.27-28.

42 For eating raw see Segal 1973-74.

43 Propp 1946; Bausinger, Ranke 1977:735.

they cooked their educator until his flesh was separated from his bones (apparently he was a kind of giant!). Then everybody went home. After some more adventures the strong youth became king.⁴⁴

Here we see a boy who grows up with a cannibal far from his parental home. He escapes precisely at the age of becoming adult. In historical times, the young novices of 'primitive' tribes do not stay with real cannibals but with the adult males who keep them under control by intimidation. In the narrative world pretences can become reality, but the loss of the ritual means that we cannot reconstruct its historical context. The presence of a kettle, however, in the story seems to point to rites of rebirth. Kettles figure also in Greek myth, for example in Medea's 'cooking' of her father-in-law Pelias (Halm-Tisserant 1993). In the context of our theme it is important to note that among many tribes the cannibalistic opponent of the novices is the Lord of the Animals (Brelch 1969:36-37).

Cannibalism is also a theme in a curious ritual complex in Magnesia, a remote Greek region, where the Hellenistic traveller Heraclides observed the following ritual:

On the top of Mt Pelion there is a cave, the so-called cave of Cheiron, and a sanctuary of Zeus Aktaios.⁴⁵ That is where the young men of the highest Magnesian classes climb to at the time of the ascent of Sirius, when the heat is at its height. They are selected by priests and are girded with fresh, thrice-shorn sheepskins. It is that cold at the top! (2.8 Pfister).

Apparently, our observer thought that he saw a group of mountaineers, who had armed themselves against the cold.⁴⁶ Burkert (1983:112, 130-34), on the other hand, has argued that we have here the description of a sacrifice after which, in order to atone for the killed sheep, the youths ascend to the sanctuary and cave of Cheiron. One need not follow Burkert here in his suggestion of atonement in order to recognise that there is more to the description than just a day out mountaineering. Unfortunately, the exact meaning of the Greek expression for the mountaineers, *tôn politôn hoi epiphanestatoi kai tais hêlikiais akmazontes*, is not that easy to establish. My translation takes as its point of departure the fact that *hêlikia* is a term often used for the age-group of the young men; in fact, on Crete an adolescent was called a *balikiotes*.⁴⁷

Certainly, young men would well fit an expedition associated with Cheiron, who was *the* Greek mythical educator and in his cave raised many Greek heroes, in

44 Levin 1978:26-35 (abbreviated).

45 For interesting descriptions of Mt Pelion see Janssens 1975; Louis 1975.

46 For the ritual see most recently Henrichs 1998:38-40.

47 Cf. Chantraine 1968: s.v. *hêlikia*, who compares Hesych. s.v. *balikiôtes: synephêbos. Krêtes*. This translation is also preferred by Borgeaud 1979:117 n. 11 ('des jeunes gens') and Bonnechere 1994:147 ('certains aristocrates, parmi les plus jeunes').

particular Achilles and Jason (Gisler-Huwiler 1986), and indeed he appears on local coins (Head 1911:II.300). There were even whispers of pederastic activities in his cave, and elsewhere in Thessaly he was connected with cannibalism,⁴⁸ both motifs sometimes connected with rites of initiation.⁴⁹ Regarding the name of the sanctuary of Zeus our traveller clearly made a mistake. As local inscriptions demonstrate, the epithet of Zeus was Akraios not Aktaios. The sanctuary was the centre of the Magnesians confederacy and the priest of Zeus Akraios one of its chiefs;⁵⁰ this sanctuary must have been the place where once the Magnesians youths were declared adult.

Burkert (1983:131) has perceptively connected this ritual with the Polyphemus passage. He pointed out that in folklore versions of the episode the hero escapes not under the ram but wrapped in its skin. Given the debatable value of these versions as proper parallels (above, § 2), it is more important to note that to escape hanging under sheep is in practice hardly possible and looks like the narrative version of a ritual dressing up in ram's skins. Moreover, as Burkert points out, the cannibalistic meal is the turning point for Odysseus. After the encounter with Polyphemus he has still nine more years to wander before returning, restoring order and becoming the king of Ithaca. In a similar way, it was told of the Arcadian Olympic winner Damarchos (*ca.* 400 BC) that after a cannibalistic feast in honour of Zeus Lykaeos he had to wander around 'as a wolf' for nine years in order to return in the tenth year as human and adult.⁵¹ It seems not unreasonable to conclude that the ritual witnessed by our Hellenistic traveller in some way might have been connected with rites of initiation, however obscure that connection may be to us now or to Heraclides.

In various ways, then, Odysseus' encounter with Polyphemus seems to refer to a background in rites of initiation.⁵² This is perhaps not surprising. We know that various important Greek myths were closely associated with rites of initiation, such as Jason and the Argonauts (Graf 1988, 1997) or Meleager and the Calydonian Hunt (Bremmer 1988c). Initiatory motifs also abound in myths connected with important figures of the Trojan War, such as Paris, Hector, Achilles, Philoctetes and Odysseus himself (Bremmer 1978). As poets often acted as initiators/educators in Greece—but also elsewhere, as, for example, in the already mentioned Turkish *Book of Dede Korkut*—it would be strange if they had not woven initiatory motifs into the myths which set standards for the young novices to follow (Bremmer

48 Eratosth. *Cat.* 40 (pederasty); Monimos *apud* Clem. Al. *Protr.* 3.42.4 (cannibalism).

49 Pederasty: Bremmer 1991. Cannibalism: below on Damarchos.

50 Burkert 1983:113-4. Priest as chief: Ruge 1930:470.

51 Bremmer 1978:13-4 (nine years); Buxton 1988 (werewolves).

52 For some further comparative observations see McCone 1996.

1988b:3). In the time of Homer the traditional rites of initiation for the elite youths had mostly disappeared, disintegrated or been reinterpreted in many parts of Greece.⁵³ This is why, I suggest, we do not find a standard initiatory scenario underlying his poems. Yet the transvestism of Achilles and Dionysos, the change of name of Paris, the wound in the foot of Philoctetes, and Odysseus' hunt with his maternal uncles all show that Homer, too, elaborated a tradition in which initiatory motifs played a major role.⁵⁴ Even if we are no longer able to trace its precise background, Odysseus' encounter with Polyphemus would perfectly fit such a context.

4. Conclusion

It is time to reach a conclusion. We have seen that early Greek mythology knew a group of smiths, the Cyclopes. Homer borrowed the name of these monstrous figures, but very little else of their tradition, in his tale of Odysseus and Polyphemus. In addition to employing initiatory motifs, he used the Cyclopes as a foil to Odysseus to stress the civilisation and cleverness of his contemporary audience. His narrative shows that monsters need not always be employed to frighten the audience, as usually happens in the modern media, but can also be used for sociological explorations.⁵⁵ At the same time, Homer told such a good story that through oral and written channels it reached people in all corners of Europe and even beyond. A good monster always transcends national borders.⁵⁶

53 For an illustrative example of the later reinterpretation of original rites of initiation see Graf 1978.

54 For detailed discussions of these motifs see Bremmer 1978, 1988, 1991, 1999b, 1999c.

55 There seems to be a growing interest in monstres. See, for example, *Faces of Monstrosity in Eighteenth-Century Thought*, a special issue of *Eighteenth-Century Life* 21 (1997) no. 2; Lecouteux 2000; Atherton 2002.

56 In this article I have made use of Bremmer 1984 and 1997. For information I am grateful to Jacqueline Borsje and Nicholas Horsfall. Ken Dowden helpfully corrected my English.

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The life cycle of the archaic Greek warrior and hero. The interplay of myth and genre in imagery

Nanno Marinatos

Introduction. Genre, narrative, motif and ideology

THE DISTINCTION between genre and narrative is not as sharp as one might think since both depend upon tradition shaped by cultural experience. The relationship of visual art and the normative background which gives shape to artistic tradition is an important topic which can take us far afield. The discussion in this paper will have to limit itself to one theme: the life cycle of the male warrior or hero.

The investigation will deal primarily with imagery on bronze Peloponnesian shields. The latter are particularly relevant to our topic because they are the carriers of male-oriented warrior ideology. Many of these shields were found in Olympia, others in Argos and Perachora, and it is agreed that they are products of an Argive school. Indeed Argos seems to be the source of the round shield.¹ It is even arguable that the epic cycle about Troy had an Argive origin.² At any rate, it is a fact that epic scenes on Corinthian³ and Argive pottery⁴ and shields⁵ are extensive.

Let us now turn to the decoration of the shields and some technical matters associated with the representation. Each shield was adorned on the outside with an *episema*, a device which the enemy would see. But also the inner bronze handle straps were decorated; they were divided into panels, and each panel contained a scene. These representations were meant to be seen by the carrier of the shield

1 Kunze 1950:215ff.

2 The epic is Argo-centric: Kunze 1950:216; Burkert 1998. The designation of the Greeks as Argives and Achaeans is not without significance, nor is the fact that Agamemnon and Diomedes, both Peloponnesian kings, are prominent leaders in the poem. Finally Athena and Hera, two patron goddesses of Argos are most prominent in the battles, whereas Poseidon is the patron god of Peloponnesian Helike and Aegai.

3 Amyx 1988. Especially interesting is the section on vases where the names of the heroes are inscribed and which give us an insight in the current epic tradition.

4 Recent discussion with bibliography in Snodgrass 1998.

5 Kunze 1950 and Bol 1989.

since they were on the inside. One wonders therefore if they had a didactic purpose. Let us note that the scenes were generated by matrices⁶ and, as Kunze has shown, the matrix determined the combination of visual motifs.⁷ It is possible that the matrix maker had a plan in mind when he chose from the pool of representations the six or seven that were to be included in each shield. We shall return to this issue; for the moment let us note that each panel was an autonomous unit, a 'motif.'

Did the panels have an inner coherence of theme? The issue of pictorial programmes (*Bildprogramme*) has been addressed by both E. Kunze and P. Bol.⁸ Neither of the two has found the rationale which determined the selection of scenes. These scholars could detect no connecting link between the panels.

If one were to ask a different question, however, namely *whether there was an ideology which connected the motifs*, then a different answer emerges. Each scene could be viewed as part of a meaningful conceptual and ideological frame, each myth constituting a paradigm. But what could this ideological web consist of?

Each culture emphasises that which is important to its survival. A warrior society will place value on the training of the young males with the purpose of turning out excellent warriors. Their career and identity are closely linked. They will be taught to value honour, accomplishment, an honourable death and funeral. Myths express the same values in a paradigmatic way. Thus genre and myth meet at an *axis* defined by social tradition: myth and genre express the same values. Thus, genre imagery can easily be turned into a specific story by the addition of a single inscription which specifies the name of the hero.

To return to the combination of motifs on bronze shields: if normative rather than narrative considerations determine the choice of motifs, the same scene could be used with or without minor alterations to designate many different characters and the message would remain the same.

Genre and myth on visual motifs: some examples

A typical scene is that of a warrior, his sword drawn and erect, moving to the left, leading a woman whom he holds by the wrist. This motif is usually identified as the abduction of Helen or the reclaiming of Helen by Menelaus⁹ (Fig. 1). Yet it could also refer to the capture of Chryseis, the abduction of Korone by Theseus or any other abducted woman or bride. For this reason, the generic designation

6 Few matrices are known, see Treister 1995:84ff.

7 Kunze 1950:215, 217.

8 Kunze 1950:49ff., Bol 1989:39.

9 Kunze 1950:163-67, form xi d; Schefold 1966: pl. 57 b; Bol 1989:74.

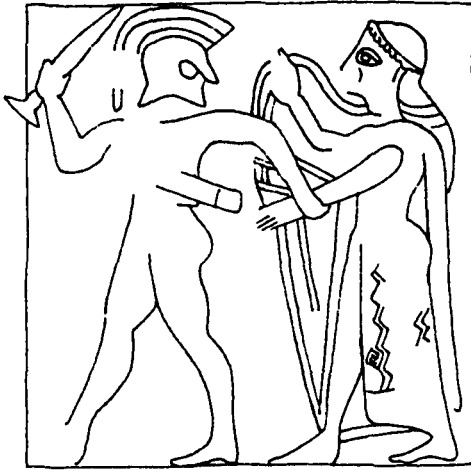


Fig. 1

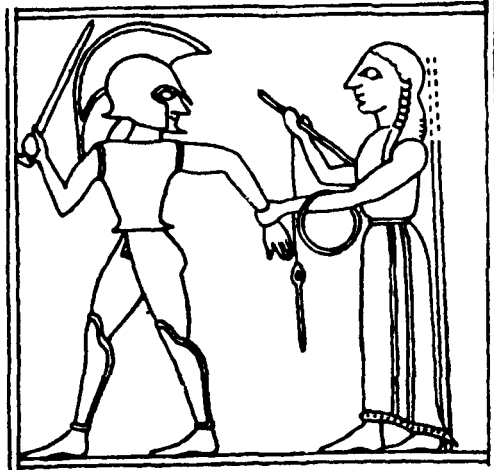


Fig. 2

'Brautraub' seems more apt to me.¹⁰ It addresses a cultural issue important to the Greeks of the Archaic age: abduction and accumulation of women contributes to the warrior's honor and shows that he is sexually active, having reached mature manhood.

Let us now change the meaning of this scene by slightly manipulating the gestures although we employ the same matrix-generated visual formula. If the woman grabs the man's wrist instead of vice versa (Fig. 2), the semeiology changes entirely. The woman tries to hold back the departing warrior.¹¹ The 'domesticity' of the woman is emphasised. She is a wife, rather than a bride to be. This is indicated by the spindle that she holds, the latter being a mark of wifely status. The message here is that the warrior must and will go to war and perform his duty despite the protestations of his wife. In narrative terms the couple may be Andromache and Hector but it could be any married couple. The normative value expresses the warrior's primary and most urgent duty which is defence of his country and the woman's reluctance to let him go because of her helplessness in the eventuality of her husband's death. The slight change in gestures is thus significant, a fact not always recognised by scholars who conflate the two formulas of Figs. 1 and 2.

10 Kunze 1950:160; Bol 1989:143, pl. 52.

11 Kunze 1950:166, (pl. 20, form v b) notices the variation of gesture but does not revise the identification of characters as Menelaus and Helen. Similarly Bol 1989:139, (form vii b) uses the same designation 'Brautraub' for both types of scenes on Figs. 2 and 3.



Fig. 3a

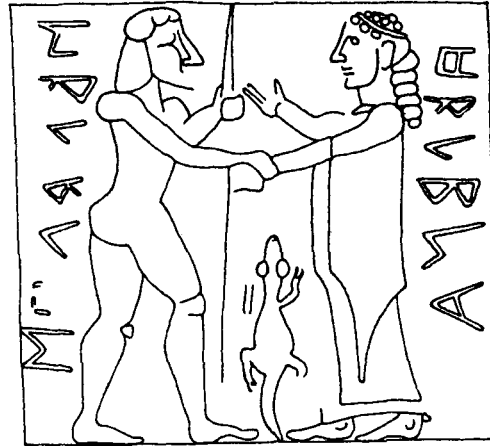


Fig. 3b

We can indulge in further experimentation with scenes of male-female interaction. In the scene of the departure of Amphiaraus, we know that the wife does not try to hold her husband back.¹² On the contrary, she has betrayed him. The artist expresses this visually by physically detaching the wife from the husband and by eliminating any gestures or contact between them.

Another formula on shield band decoration consists of a couple facing each other, the man grabbing the woman's wrist.¹³ The couple may be Hera and Zeus, Helen and Menelaus (Figs. 3 a and b), Hector and Andromache, or any other famous couple. The bond is sexual, emphasised by the presence of the lizird which (being a magical determinative) arguably stresses the poignancy of the moment.¹⁴ Sexual union and marriage is an important stage in a warrior's career because it embodies the transition into the category 'mature man' as opposed to 'young warrior.'

Thus we have isolated three motifs dealing with gender roles, all of which help place the warrior's life in perspective. We have seen that the particulars of the story are subsumed under the normative expression of the 'motif.'

12 Boardman 1992:167-70.

13 Schefold 1966:85, fig. 32; Bol 1989:48-49, fig. 9.

14 The lizird is a bad omen ('Unheil') according to Bol 1989:74. On the other hand, Grabow 1998:86 n. 28, allows for a greater variety of interpretations including regeneration because lizards grow tails back. This hypothesis is strengthened by the parallel symbolism in Egyptian amulets: Andrews 1994:32, figs. 28, 66. In Egyptian imagery the lizird is a magical sign with positive connotations.

The life cycle of the hero

We now come to the central thesis of this paper: each scene on the shield bands focuses on a stage in the life cycle and career of the warrior, mythical hero, even a god. The stages range from the hero's adolescence to his death and are punctuated by accomplishments of various types: glory in battle, defeat of monsters or wild animals, the abduction of women, subjugation of the enemy or wild women, such as Amazons. There is also sexual union and marriage not because the latter are 'accomplishments' but because they signify transition into a new stage.

It should be noted, however, that the arrangement of the panels was not dictated by a chronological sequence of events as they might occur in a story; rather, they were chosen because of their relevance to the warrior's identity.

As an experiment, I have created an artificial shield-strap consisting of scenes taken from genuine shields. This artificial composition has a meaningful narrative sequence which reflects the hero's career and life. We shall see that this artificial strap has many common points with the *Iliad*.

Panel a. The rider (Fig. 4 a)

How did Greeks divide age groups? The early stages of the life of a Spartan citizen was in some ways identified with the *agoge* and death in battle was the end.¹⁵ The *agoge* starts at 7 and the (pre)military training takes place between 14 and 17. The formal age grades have names: *mikizomenos*, *propais*, *pais*, *mellereiren*, *eiren*. From the age of 20 there was formal membership in the army involving armour. The age of marriage was about 30. The *agoge* thus presupposed four distinct groups: the ephebe pre-warrior (sexually he is passive *eromenos*); the unmarried warrior; the married warrior; the old man (*geron*).

One series of pictorial motifs consists of young unbearded ephebe riders who have no armour, not being full warriors as yet.¹⁶ One shield panel shows an un-bearded youth trying to tame two huge horses simultaneously by holding both their reigns.¹⁷ Alternatively, a youth on horseback accompanies the armed warrior (Fig. 5).¹⁸ In this last instance we have a partnership of the ephebe with the full warrior. The ephebe is being trained for battle.

In Archaic Greek art, the ephebe is visually represented as a rider on horseback. He is naked or wears a *chitoniskos*; he has long hair (as opposed to the short hair in 5th cent. vases) and is beardless. In the *Iliad*, the ephebe is represented by Polydorus, and Lykaon, to the unfortunate fate of whom we shall return further on. In

15 The most reliable source is Xen. *Lac.* and Plut. *Lyc.* Overview in Pettersson 1992:78-90.

16 Lissarague 1990:205-210, 236, 238. For the imagery of adolescents: Schnapp 1985:101-125.

17 Kunze 1950:Beilage 13.

18 Kunze 1950:pl. 46, form xviii a.

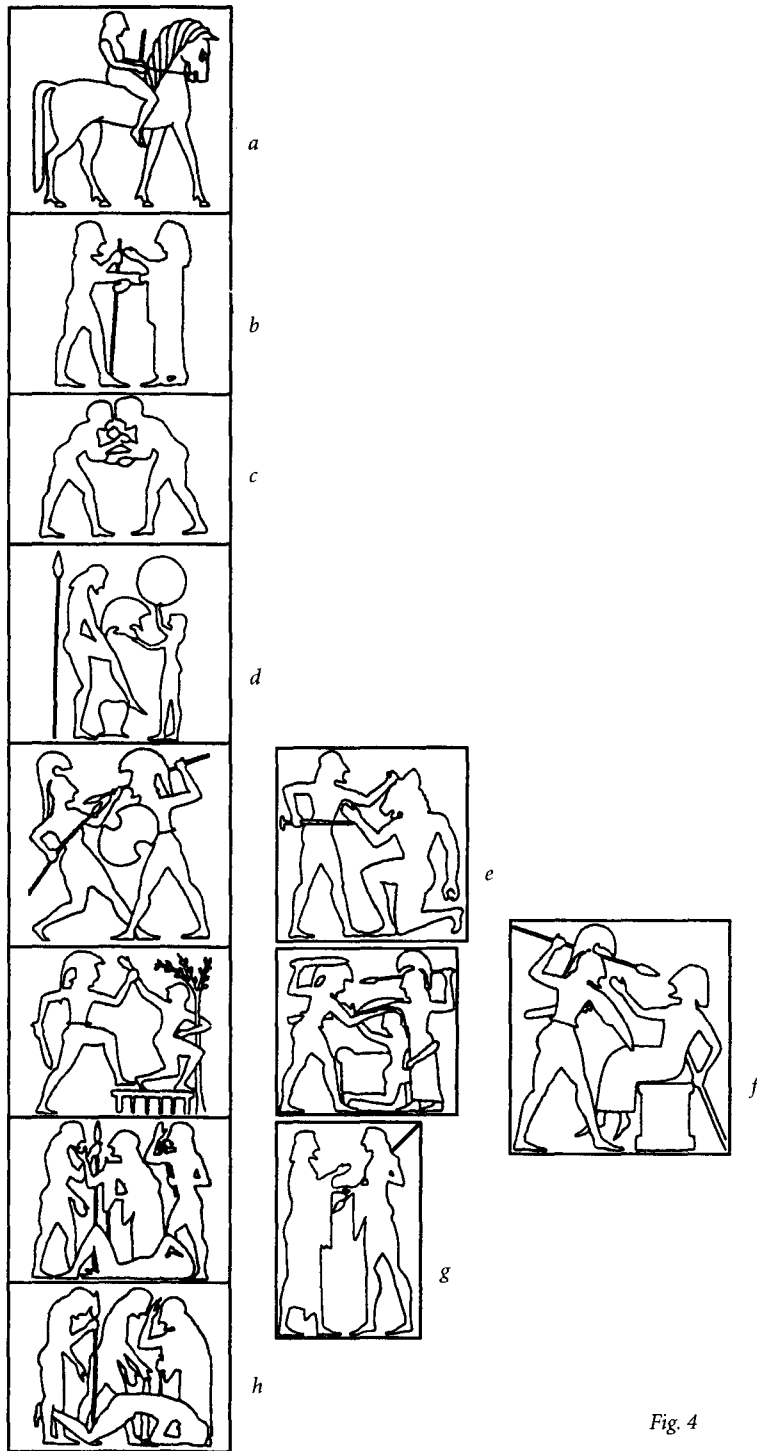


Fig. 4

the imagery of the shields, the rider is sometimes Bellerophon associated with the monster Chimaera; other times there is no monster and the rider stands for youths in general.¹⁹ It is important to note that the ephebe on horseback is never active as a fighter (Figs. 4 a; 5); even Bellerophon is not engaged in battle with Chimaera; the latter is there only as a potential opponent isolated in a panel below the rider, perhaps alluding to his future glory. In the epic tradition, the ephebe (Polydorus, Lykaon or Troilus) is a victim and his main role in the plot is to be killed by the mature warrior Achilles. Concepts of hierarchy and dominance within the *agoge* may have given rise to the myths where the adolescent plays a passive role; for myths are encoded cultural communication systems. The ephebe thus symbolises the aspiration to warrior status, an aspiration as yet unfulfilled which carries dangers inherent in the vulnerability of the youth. When the ephebe rises to the occasion by killing a monster, as does Bellerophon on the shield panels, the time has come for him to make the transition into adulthood.

Panel b. Marriage (Fig. 4 b)

As mentioned above, marriage is an important transition into manhood in the male's career. It signifies dominance in sexuality (as opposed to the passive role of the *eromenos*), as well as responsibility. That marriage was perceived as an important transition in maturation rites can be shown by the fact that scenes of couples appear on grave monuments in the 7th cent., as at Prinias.²⁰ As well, marriage imagery features on funerary urns of the Orientalizing period, as for example on one from Arkades, Crete, where a man touches a woman's cheek and lower abdomen.²¹ We have seen above that when a couple faces one another (Fig. 3) the significance is sexual union or marriage. The variant scheme, 'abduction' (Fig. 1) reflects a similar concept; here the emphasis is on the active role of the warrior. The abducted woman may become a wife (as Andromache) or may remain a mistress (as Ariadne, Cassandra, Chryseis, Briseis).²² Finally, the scheme 'warrior's departure' (Fig. 2) alludes to the warrior's responsibility towards his city. Marriage is thus emblematic of mature status, whether on the *stele* of a grave or on a shield.

The departing warrior is often but not always linked to the married warrior. Sometimes he shakes hands with an older man, presumably his father.²³

In *Iliad* 6 the scene of the departing warrior is represented by Hector. Andromache tries to hold Hector back in a moving speech which every schoolchild

19 Kunze 1950:pl. 70 ii c; pl. 72, vii a, viii c b; Schefold 1966:pls. 22, 40 b. Payne 1940:pl. 48, 11.

20 The social significance of the scenes on the grave monuments is argued extensively by Lebessi 1976.

21 Levi 1931:341, fig. 443 d.

22 Stewart 1996:74-89.

23 Kunze 1950:l. 35, form xi b.

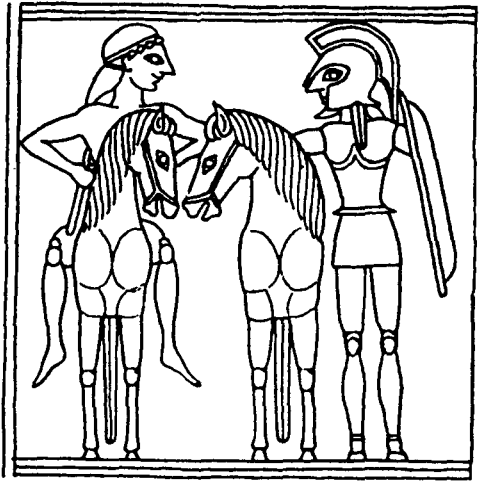


Fig. 5

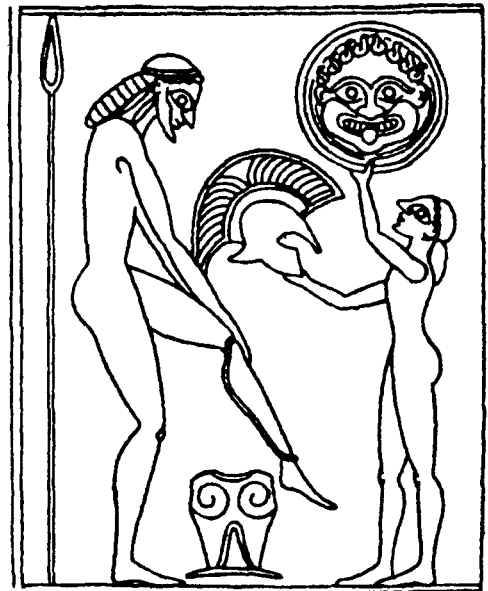


Fig. 6

used to know by heart. In some ways, Hector is the warrior *par excellence* because he is a defender of country and family rather than an aggressor. He departs for war with the consciousness that he may not return; nevertheless he has to fulfil his duty as a warrior and a leader. Compare with Fig. 2.

Panel c. Athletics (Fig. 4 c)

The warrior must also be an athlete.²⁴ We hear much about athletics in *Iliad* 22, the Funeral Games of Patroclus. On the shield straps it is boxing that is chosen as the epitome of athletic competition, possibly because it has a striking analogy to fighting. In the *Odyssey* athletics serve to establish Odysseus' identity as a superior man both at Scherie (Hom. *Od.* 8:186ff.) and at Ithaca in the boxing match with the beggar Irus (Hom. *Od.* 18:66ff.). Athletic training was of great importance in the *agoge*.²⁵

Panel d. Armament (Fig. 4 d)

Serious fighting is signalled by the ritual of putting on armour. On the shield straps the warrior bends his knee to put on one grievie whereas a helper is handing to him shield and helmet (Fig. 6).²⁶ The cuirass lies on the ground, the spear on the side.

²⁴ Athletic groups can be divided into classes of ephebes and mature men, *i.e.* warriors. Note that the contestants on the shield straps are bearded: Kunze 1950:pl. 47, form xviii e; more ambiguous Kunze 1950:form xlii b.

²⁵ Kennel 1995.

On early 6th cent. vases, the formula is repeated whilst secondary figures may be added: a wife or the father of the warrior. Sometimes even the patron goddess Athena or the helper Hermes are present.²⁷

Arming has more significance than meets the eye. It is a moment of choice during which the warrior has made the decision to fight and possibly to die. In the *Iliad* the procedure of putting on the armour is described at length for a good reason: it leads to glory but it is also a signal of the hero's approaching doom. Thus, Patroclus' armament marks the beginning of his end (Hom. *Il.* 16.131-137). Similarly, when Hector puts on the armour of Achilles, which he has stripped from the body of the dead Patroclus, he is about to experience his last glory.

'When Zeus the Cloud-compeller saw Hector from afar equipping himself in the arms of divine Achilles he shook his head and said to himself: Unhappy man! Little knowing how close you are to death Well, for the moment great glory will be yours. But you must pay for it. There will be no home-coming for you from battle ...' (Hom. *Il.* 17.194-207 trans. Rieu)

In Achilles' case, death is foretold to the hero by his divine horses after he has put on his new armour:

'Indeed my dreaded master, we will once more bring you safely home today. Yet the hour of your death is drawing near (Hom. *Il.* 19:408-409).

The scene of armament is thus more than just an instance of the warrior's preparation for war. It looks forward to glory, but at the same time, it signals death.

Panel e. Fighting (Fig. 4 e)

The major accomplishments of a hero can be divided into two groups: (1) defeat of monster (Fig. 7);²⁸ (2) defeat of opponent in war (Fig. 8). These two categories are interchangeable, and are chosen according to the literary genre. The monster (Fig. 7) fits the myth or folktale. The human adversary is appropriate to the epic hero (Fig. 8). Sometimes the human adversary is an Amazon as in Fig. 8. In this case, the hero asserts his male dominance over the untamed female.

Artistically, the adversary (be it a monster, an Amazon or a warrior) is depicted in a similar manner. Broken down with one knee bent, he/she is faltering whereas the hero is dominant.

Panel f: Quarrel

There is an important variation of the fighting scene which I have not included in my artificial shield strap. Two warriors face each other, their shields are clashing

26 Kunze 1950:form xi c.

27 Lissarrague 1985:63, figs. 63-64.

28 Kunze 1950:form iii, d, e; iv, e.

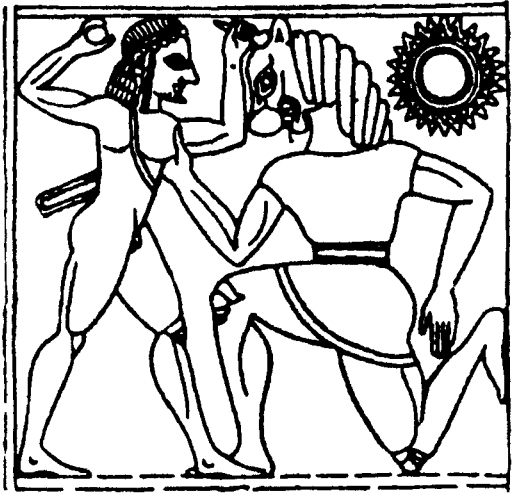


Fig. 7



Fig. 8

and their swords are drawn.²⁹ In their midst a bearded man raises his hand in mediation. Behind each warrior are two men trying to hold back their comrade (Fig. 9). Thus the fight is illegitimate, it must refer to a quarrel between members of the same party. The names are Lycurgus and Amphiaraus, the man in the centre being Adrastus. This episode must derive from the *The Seven Against Thebes* cycle, perhaps a lost literary version as Schefold suggests.³⁰ Lycurgus was king of Nemea, one of the first places where the Seven stopped and where baby Opheltes met his early death after being bitten by a snake. Amphiaraus is one of the Seven, so is Adrastus. We know there was a conflict between the Seven and Lycurgus. The conflict here is between equals. But there is also a second type of conflict which involves the conflict of generations. In this motif Achilles is normally the protagonist. There is a clear reference to a quarrel between Achilles and Odysseus in Book 8 of the *Odyssey* (Demodocus' song), a version not alluded to by the poet of the *Iliad*. Further, Proclus testifies to a quarrel between Achilles and Diomedes as an episode in the *Aithiopsis*.³¹ Finally the *menis* of Achilles is the central theme of the *Iliad*. It stands to reason that the motif 'quarrel' was not a unique invention of the poet of the *Iliad*. It was rather endemic to the heroic culture, a literary and visual topos, connected

29 Kunze 1950:pl. 45, form xvii e, p. 22; Schefold 1966:83, fig. 31.

30 Schefold 1966:83.

31 Stat. *Theb.* 4.652ff.; Rose 1958:191 with n. 31. Kullmann 1960:52-57; Andersen 1978:20-21.

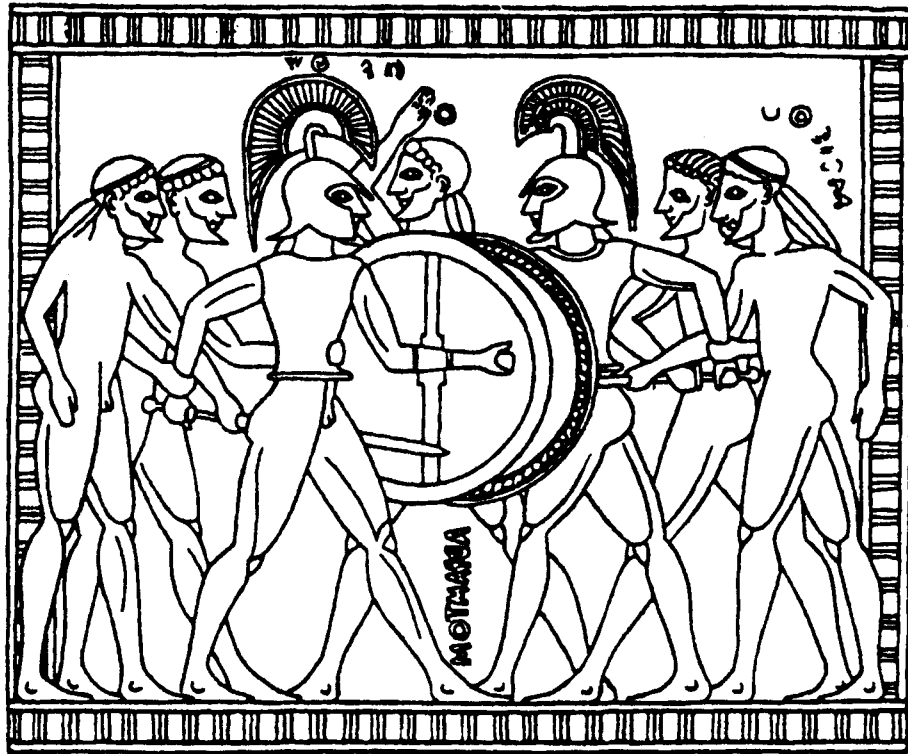


Fig. 9

mostly with Achilles (on account of his youth) but not exclusively with him. As a motif of epic tradition, its normative function may have been to serve as a negative paradigm: a warning against the possibility of civil strife which is dangerous for the internal coherence of the group.

Panel f. Killing of the defenseless (Fig. 4 f)

The important heroes in the *Iliad* reach a stage of uncontrolled rage, a '*menos*.' This means that they lose their sense of limitation and transgress mental and moral barriers.

Rage is not to be confused with *aristeia*, for not all heroes who excel in battle reach the stage of rage in the *Iliad*. Diomedes, for example, a most worthy hero, always acts properly; even when he fights the gods he is under the guidance of Athena.³²

But Hector and Achilles both succumb to excessive rage. Hector is in a state of rage (*menos*) from the moment he attacks the Achaean wall up until he kills Patro-

32 Andersen 1978.

clus and strips him of his armour (books 15-17). The poet talks of ‘the *menos* of man-slaying Hector’ (Hom. *Il.* 17. 638) and describes him as follows:

‘He raged like the war-god spear in hand, or like a fire on the mountains, working destruction in the deep recesses of the woods. There was foam in his mouth; his eyes flashed under lowering brows; there was menace even in the swaying of the helmet on his temples as he fought.’ (Hom. *Il.* 15.605ff.)

The imagery describes a man out of control best expressed by the fire simile. Later on, the rage takes the form of a moral transgression. Hector is prepared to commit an outrage on the body of Patroclus:

‘Hector stripped the body of Patroclus and wanted to behead him with his sharp sword and drag off the trunk, and give it to the dogs of Troy’ (Hom. *Il.* 17.125-127)

This rage signals the hero’s end:

‘Zeus himself was serving as his ally ... since he had but a short time to live. Pallas Athene was already speeding up the fatal day when he should fall to the mighty son of Peleus.’ (Hom. *Il.* 15.610-614)

Achilles’ rage is described vividly as he fights the river and chokes it with innumerable bodies of young men. Together with the words ‘*menos*’ etc., the poet uses the word ‘demon’ (Hom. *Il.* 21.18) to describe him. He chokes the river’s waters with human bodies.

Achilles’ *menos* is also expressed as a slaughter of youths, a topic with which I have dealt elsewhere.³³ It is not clear if Achilles commits a moral transgression or whether his act is a brutal expression of his biological superiority over the ephebe, a norm which was emphasised during the *agoge*.

The literary evidence first: when Achilles encounters the son of Priam, Lycaon, who is unarmed and naked (the poet specifies that he was ‘with neither helmet, shield, nor spear.’ Hom. *Il.* 21.50), he kills him and rejects his rather lengthy plea for mercy. He slaughters him by striking on his collar bone beside the neck. An analogy with a sacrificial animal cannot have escaped the audience, since Lycaon was not only naked but vulnerable because of his youth. Achilles kills also the youngest son of Priam, Polydorus, whom he pursues. Both youths fall victim to the more formidable warrior. Achilles kills another twelve Trojan youths by the funeral pyre of Patroclus: the poet comments that he contrived evil deeds in his mind (Hom. *Il.* 23.176).

We turn now to a striking analogy with the panels from the shields where the warrior is shown about to slaughter an unarmed youth or child (Figs. 4 f., 10 and 11).³⁴ There are two variant schemes. In one (Figs. 4 f and 10) the child has taken

33 Marinatos in R. Hägg (ed.), *The child in Greek cult* (forthcoming).

34 Kunze 1950:pl. 71 form i b; pl. 73 form xi a.



Fig 10

refuge on an altar and is looking backwards towards the warrior as though to arouse his pity. The warrior is in motion, his sword is drawn ready to be put into murderous use. This scheme reminds us of the killing of unarmed Lycaon and the twelve Trojan youths who were 'sacrificed' since the language of the poet suggests an analogy between unarmed youth and sacrificial victim. Visually 'sacrifice' is suggested clearly by the presence of the altar.³⁵ Another shield strap shows the child supplicating the warrior who is about to strike.³⁶

The other variant (Fig. 11) shows the warrior dangling a youth by his arm; the warrior is about to strike the fatal blow.³⁷ This position emphasises the dominance of the older warrior over the helpless state of the victim.

The warriors have been variously identified as Achilles or Neoptolemus. It does not really matter since the two are interchangeable figures fulfilling much the same role (after Achilles' death, his part was naturally played by the son).

Helpless victims include old men and women, besides youths. This act too is shown on the shield panels: the rape of Cassandra (Fig. 4 f) and the death of an old king.³⁸

Rage is the logical conclusion of armament and glory. It is the penultimate stage of the hero's cycle and the prelude to his end, although, in the *Iliad* at least, the death of the hero is not presented directly as punishment for transgressions. Achilles, for example, does not die because of his crimes. The outrageous acts can be seen as the culmination of the blood thirst that war excites in the fighter. Although not condoned, rage seems to have been accepted in some sense, since it explores the limitations of the warrior's taboos.

35 Morris 1995; Blome 1998.

36 Bol 1989:pl. 74, form H 57, a-b.

37 Kunze 1950:pl. 73 form ix c; xi, a.

38 Kunze 1950:pl. 71 form i c; iv b; pl. 73, form x c.

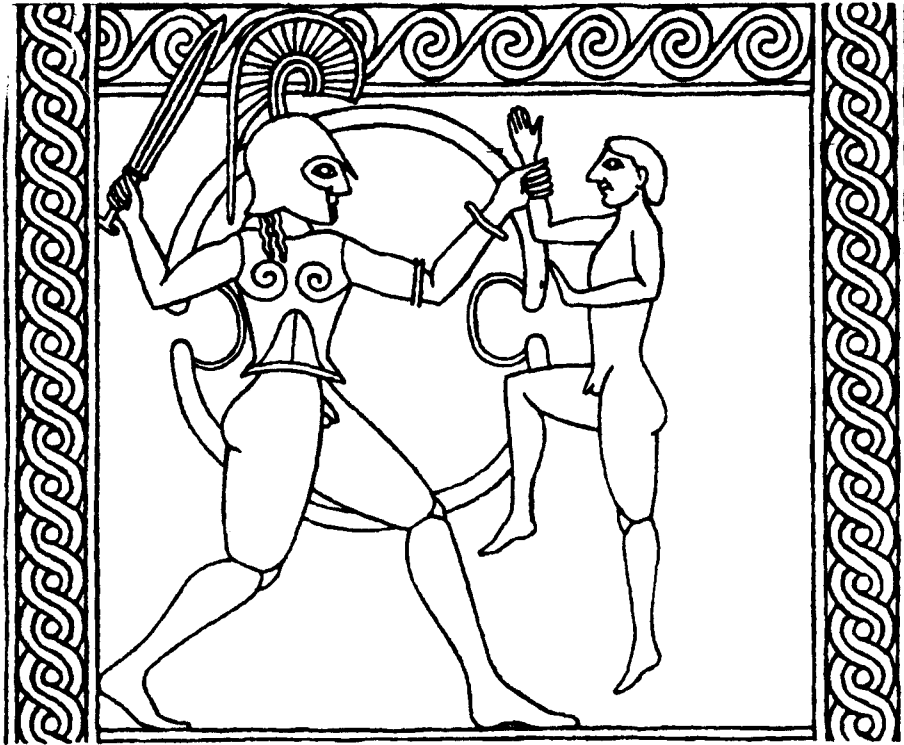


Fig. 11

One inherent trait in human beings is mercy. Yet the warrior may have to reject it. The rejection of mercy is met several times in the *Iliad*. Suffice it to mention two examples. Agamemnon advises Menelaus not to pity a pleading Trojan by reminding him of vengeance, a force that drives the warrior forward. Achilles rejects the plea of Lycaon:

‘Yes my friend,’ says Achilles to Lycaon, ‘you too must die. Why make lament in such a manner? Even Patroclus died, who was by far a better man than you.’ (Hom. *Il.* 21.106-108)

Panel g. Mercy (Fig. 4 g)

Yet, the true Greek hero rises above vengeance and is capable of mercy. In the *Iliad*, the encounter of Achilles and Priam is the culmination of the development of the young man’s character. Compassion overrides all his other feelings, and the consuming vengeance is quenched when compared to the extent of human misery. Priam suddenly appears to Achilles, not as an enemy but as an old man, resembling his own father.



Fig 12.

The scene is paradigmatic, in my view, an exemplum of mercy and this is why it appears on shield panels. Priam is rendered as an old man, distinguishable by a long robe, pleading by touching the young warrior's chin (Figs. 4 g and 12).³⁹ On the ground lies a dead warrior, whose body is being negotiated. Behind the old suppliant is Hermes. The presence of the divine figure is not visual wordiness. It serves the purpose of establishing the legitimacy of the plea. Priam and Achilles are the protagonists here, yet the setting is not

what we find in the *Iliad*, for Achilles in the epic is seated indoors when Priam arrives and Hermes has already departed, whereas Hector's body is not present. The visual language on the shield reproduces the motif but not the exact circumstances of the *Iliad*. It stresses the vulnerability of the older man, slightly bent by age, and the ambivalent feelings of the warrior whose resolution is beginning to soften. Thus, the literary and visual tradition differ in details although they focus on the same subject.

Panel h. Death (Fig. 4 h)

The warrior dies in battle. He is always depicted as lying on the ground and is always naked. Nudity signals vulnerability rather than just heroic status, for reasons which will be discussed below. If he is on the stomach with bent knees, the warrior is not dead yet but in the process of dying.⁴⁰ If he is on his back, his soul has departed (compare Figs. 4 g and h). There is thus a difference between Ajax who has committed suicide falling on an erect sword (Fig. 4 h) and Hector who has been killed in battle and whose body is being negotiated (Fig. 4 g and 12). Both are naked.

In the *Iliad*, the vulnerability of the hero, who is about to be killed, is signalled by the gradual removal of his armour. Patroclus, for example, is hit by Apollo. The stages of his disarmament are exactly the reverse of the armament scenes. First

39 Kunze 1950:pl. 71 form iv f.

40 Kunze 1950:pl. 71 form iv c.

Patroclus' helmet is knocked off, then the spear is shattered in his hands; the shield falls from his shoulder; Apollo undoes the corselet on his breast. 'Patroclus was stunned; his shapely legs refused to carry him; and he stood there in a daze.' (Hom. *Il.* 16.801-806). It was mentioned above that, in art, the naked bodies of the dead heroes denote their vulnerable state.⁴¹

The death of the hero ends the cycle. On the shields, the mourning figures who beat their heads with their hand, allude to the funeral. I think that it is hardly an accident that the *Iliad* ends with the funeral of Hector. It is a fitting motif to bring closure to the life of a warrior and it may be argued that in some ways Hector embodies 'the' hero.

Conclusions

The motifs that have been investigated show a correlation between visual and literary tradition. They are mythological scenes but they are also generic, each representing a stage in the life of the hero. The choice of the scenes was determined by the norms of the Greek warrior culture. The important stages of the hero's life are defined by transitions from adolescence into adulthood, marriage, death. Also stressed are significant turning points, such as armament and killing. The outrage (or excessively violent behaviour) that a warrior may commit (and which military-oriented cultures inevitably accept) may be paradigms reflecting ambivalent values. The motifs on the shield straps depict not the glorious moments alone but the consequences of aggression. Killing of children, violation of women and murders of old men show that, under special circumstances, the warrior may transgress moral boundaries. Yet, the Greeks apparently possessed the ability of self-reflection (and this is precisely what the images on the *inside* of the shield are meant to do). The warrior looks at the straps in the handles of his shield; they are meant to promote his understanding of prototypes and roles (whereas the exterior images act as terrifying devices for the enemy). The scenes of pitiless murder are balanced by the possibility of compassion: Achilles does give in to Priam's plea.

The moments in the hero's life which are singled out in art constitute also the important structural blocks of the epic. The visual motifs apply to the crucial stages which both Hector and Achilles have to go through in the literary tradition. In art as well as literature, we may speak of motifs which are both generic and normative. This is the stuff that epic is made of.

There may be some implications for the chronology of the *Iliad*. The motifs were current in a particular chronological horizon ranging from the middle of the

41 The literary convention is of Near Eastern origin. When Ishtar goes to the underworld she is successively stripped of her clothes and ornaments until she is completely naked. Then she is hanged.

7th cent. to the end of the Archaic period. The brief glimpse that we get into the lives of two major heroes, Hector and Achilles, follows a certain rhythm. Arming for war; gaining glory; being in a state of rage; confronting the issue of mercy; becoming vulnerable by being stripped naked, meeting death. However, the uniqueness and quality of the personalities as outlined by Homer are his own. Moreover, the thoughts which Achilles expresses to Priam regarding what is human and indeed 'humane,' go beyond the simple language that genre imagery is able to express. They also go beyond anything that oral tradition could achieve. They are products of a written poem and remain the poet's own unique accomplishment.

*List of Captions**

*Please note that 'form' refers to matrix.

- Fig. 1. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Bol 1989:75, fig. 21.
- Fig. 2. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Schefold 1966:fig. 33.
- Fig. 3a Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Schefold 1966:fig. 32.
- Fig. 3b Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Bol 1989:174.
- Fig. 4. Artificial composite strap with selected panels from Olympia shields.
- Fig. 5. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Kunze 1950:pl. 46, form xviii a.
- Fig. 6. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Kunze 1950:form xi c.
- Fig. 7. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Kunze 1950:pl.18, form iv e.
- Fig. 8. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Kunze 1950:form v c.
- Fig. 9. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Schefold 1966:fig. 31.
- Fig. 10. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Kunze 1950:form i b.
- Fig. 11. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Kunze 1950:form ix c.
- Fig. 12. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Kunze 1950:pl.19, form iv f.

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Greek myth—Etruscan symbol

Marjatta Nielsen

WHEN I RECEIVED the invitation to the symposium in Tromsø, I proposed to give a survey of the uses of Greek mythology among a group of outsiders, the Etruscans. Identifiable Greek myths appear in Etruscan art from the beginning to the end. Consequently, we can follow the subsequent stages of acculturation among a wealthy and influential pre-Roman people in Italy, by looking at the ways in which they received and understood Greek myths in the framework of their own culture. And, we have to remember that the Etruscans were not even Indo-Europeans, a fact that did not seem to bother them at all.

However, Synnøve des Bouvrie asked me to take up in my paper a certain topic, 'the Verucchio throne,' which I had presented at a colloquium on women in Antiquity in Gothenburg in 1997. No Greek nor local myths are depicted in the woodcarvings of the chair, but they may very well touch the question of 'symbol.' Therefore, my paper is divided into two parts, the first dealing with everyday scenes as symbolic expressions in early Etruscan art, the second with the uses of Greek myth as symbol among the Etruscans. In fact, the first part paves the way for understanding the second part.

I. Etruscan symbol: beyond the image

The history of symbolic expressions among the Etruscans brings us to the very beginning, to the protohistoric, pre-literate Villanova culture (ca. 900-700 BC), which covered the very same areas of Italy, which, after the introduction of writing, showed to belong to the Etruscans.¹

In the Villanovan period, burial urns of clay or bronze, helmets, horse-equipment, bronze belts *etc.* were decorated with geometric patterns, with no recognizable narrative contents. As in the case of Greek art in the Geometric period (Boardman 1983), the 'signs' and patterns in Villanova art may have contained

1 E.g. Bartoloni 1989.

narrative messages, but we cannot 'read' the stories. Probably even the contemporaries had difficulties, since every potter had their own individual 'language.'²

The lack of narrative elements in art is by no means a guarantee for a lack of verbal narratives, as we can see from the famous *kotyle* from the Euboean settlement of Pithekoussai, the so-called 'Nestor's cup,' decorated with Geometric patterns and birds, but furnished with the earliest known Greek metric text and 'literary' allusion.³ Pithekoussai/Ischia in the Bay of Naples was a true melting pot of Greek, Phoenician, and indigenous Italic and Etruscan influences. Etruscan iron was the magnet which attracted Greeks to as close to Etruria as the Etruscans allowed them to come.⁴

In Etruria, in the late eighth century BC, biconical urns of the old Villanova shapes were occasionally made following new pottery techniques, including painting. Birds are the only recognisable creatures on many pots, but soon also men, women and horses begin to appear. At times we may discern rudimentary narrative contents, hunting scenes being among the earliest favourites.⁵

Some early representations give with simple means a basic idea of the social organization and everyday life.⁶ Among them is the 'Verucchio throne,' a round-backed chair of a shape as if cut out of a tree-trunk.⁷ The Villanovan-Etruscan enclave of Verucchio is situated on a steep hill-top, not far from the Adriatic coast, *i.e.*, outside Etruria proper, with which it is communicating through the Marecchia valley and through passes over the Appennines. At Verucchio, the grave pits in the necropoleis down the hill were filled with water and mud, which have secured the

2 According to Judith Toms' studies on Villanova pottery from Tarquinia (paper given at the University of Copenhagen 15th May 1997).

3 Ridgway 1992:56, 1997, Buchner-Ridgway 1993:212, 745-59, Skaftø Jensen 1996, all with many further refs.

4 A victim of Etruscan methods of keeping the strangers away may be a man, who was killed and buried with an Euboean vase as the only gravegoods in the 'sacred area' in Pian di Civita, Tarquinia: Tarquinia 1997, Bonghi Jovino, Mallegni and Usai 1997. Herodotus' account on the fate of Phocaeans prisoners, killed near Cerveteri, seems confirmed by archaeological evidence, *cf.* Torelli 1981.

5 *E.g.* a Geometric stamoid jar, 700-680 BC, with a man assaulting a woman, in the presence of a horse and a boy, Princeton University Art Museum (inv. 1996-157-158). For rudimentary narrative contents in Etruria in the Orientalising period, *e.g.* Camporeale 1989, 1991, Maggiani 1996, Nardi 1997, and below.

6 Menichetti 1994. *Cf.* particularly the bronze urns and wheeled cauldron from Bisenzio, the necropolis of Olmo Bello, latest Massa-Pairault 1996:27, 35, Torelli 1997a:28, 35-36, 43a, *id.* 1997b.

7 First published by Gentili 1987. Among the undecorated 'thrones' at Verucchio there are some which are genuinely cut out of one piece of tree-trunk, but they go easily out of shape. For that reason, and not only for saving wood, most of the chairs of that shape are made of thinner boards, consolidated with metal rivets, or they are entirely covered with bronze sheet.

preservation of all those organic materials which we normally are missing. Several such chairs have been found there, most of them only decorated with wheel-shaped perforations—perhaps celestial symbols?⁸ At least two chairs have, however, figured scenes. One, from tomb 26 of the Moroni necropolis (Sassatelli 1996:261 fig. 16) is too fragmentary for a reconstruction of the scenes, but another one, from the rich tomb 89 in the Lippi necropolis, has been reconstructed with only few pieces missing. The outer side is as if imitating basketry patterns, while the elaborate woodcarvings on the inner side of the chair-back give us a unique glimpse into village life about 650-600 BC.

My immediate impression, when studying the chair some years ago in the well-lit room in the Museo Civico Archeologico at Bologna,⁹ was that the scenes were depicting the microcosmos of a village community and the division of male and female competencies within it. And, what I remember from my student days when studying Finnish ethnology suggested me that the chair and its decorations might have something to do with wedding and bridal gifts—more or less the only occasion which brings men to underline the balance between the sexes and to give due credit also to women's contribution to the family and society. Then, reading more about the throne, I was persuaded by G.V. Gentili's (1987) interpretation of the scenes as giving the whole story of wool-working (Nielsen 1998:71-73, with refs.). Only recently—after the symposium in Tromsø—I became acquainted with Mario Torelli's interpretation, which also brings in wedding symbolism, and with Giuseppe Sassatelli's study which places the scenes in a wider context of aristocratic household.¹⁰ By and large I agree with both, but encouraged by the support given to my original interpretation which I presented at Tromsø, I will take it as the basis of the discussion (Fig. 1).

The space with the figured decorations is divided horizontally into two registers, upper and lower, and vertically into three, a central part surrounded by mar-

8 Perhaps the reason for these perforated decorations was originally due to masking some branch scars.

9 The contents of the tombs Lippi 85 and 89 were then exhibited in full day-light in the Museo Civico Archeologico, which was good for scholars but disastrous for organic material. Therefore the dim light in the museum at Verucchio is ideal for the conservation of the objects, but the rapidly moving spotlight directed towards the throne prevents any attempt of checking the details. Good detail pictures are published by Massa-Pairault 1996, and Torelli 1997a (but some of them reversed). Patrizia von Eles informs that a more reliable drawing will be available in 2002; that may cause alterations to the present interpretations.*

10 Sassatelli 1996, Torelli 1997a:52-85 (but already published in 1992), both with further references to diverging interpretations, such as Kossack 1992 (which does not sound very convincing). See also Massa-Pairault 1996:63, 65, Torelli 1997b. A series of further 'thronological' studies (the Verucchio chair has created a whole new discipline) are on their way, e.g. by Adriano Maggiani (who does not share Torelli's interpretation), and by Larissa Bonfante, who is in favour of the division of labour between the sexes (both personal communications).

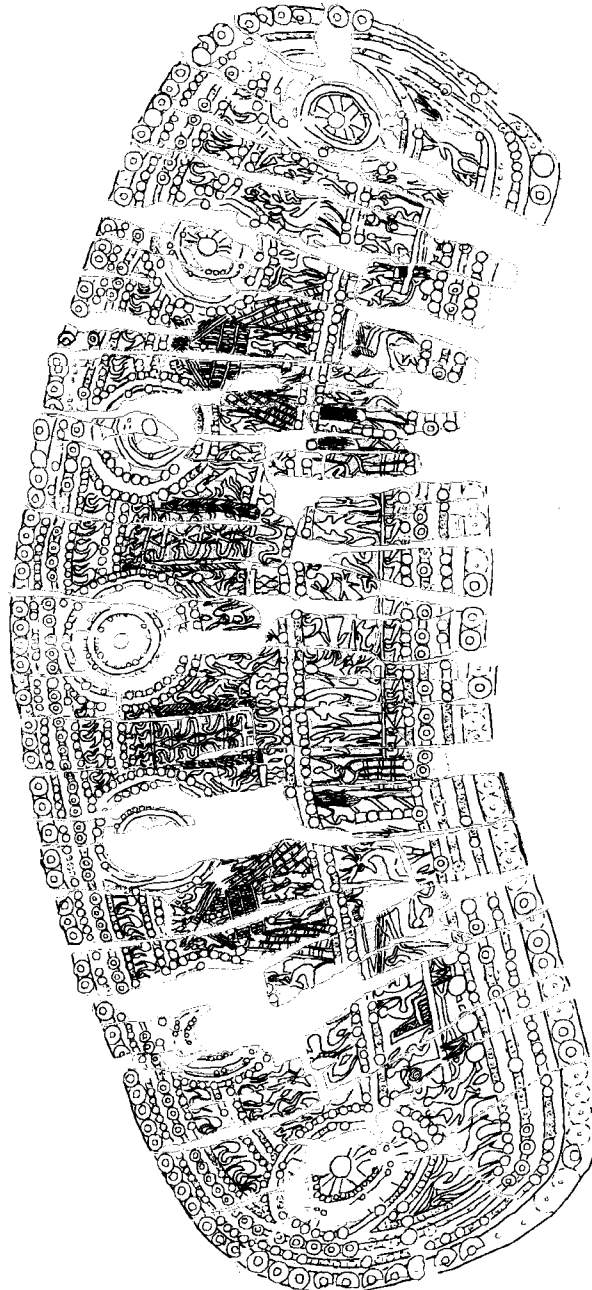
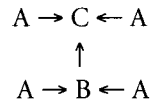


Fig. 1. The figured scenes of the wooden throne from Verucchio, tomb 89 of the Lippi necropolis. Ca. 650-600 BC. The letters indicate the zones referred to: A) 'wild life,' B) men's domain, C) women's domain. Verucchio, Museo Civico Archeologico (drawing Guerriero e sacerdote 2002, pl. xxvi). See *additional note p. 194.

ginal zones. A vertical axe through the centre divides the chairback into two symmetrical parts, right and left, each other's mirror images, probably achieved by reversing a perforated model sheet, *e.g.* made of leather. The marginal areas (marked 'A') both in the upper and the lower register are characterised by the presence of horned animals. The upper central zone ('C') shows human figures mostly having a long back braid, *i.e.* women, while the braid is lacking in the lower central zone ('B'), so there we are probably dealing with men.

The scenes are best described from the margins towards the centre, from bottom to top, in the following order:



The areas 'A' with animals describe the wilderness, outside the men's (and women's) domain, a 'liminal space'. The animals have mostly been interpreted as sheep,¹¹ but both their size and the many-forked horns rather define them as deer. Here and there between the animals seem to be human beings—perhaps hunters, shepherds, or even enemies or outlaws?

Still within the 'wild life area' (as the big deer indicate) two wagons are proceeding towards the centre. The wagons are quite big, undoubtedly four-wheeled, and they are pulled by oxen and steered by a man. The passenger on the wagon (at least the one to the left) is a man, comfortably sitting on a chair; his oversized, two-forked hand may perhaps be understood as a hand holding up a sign of rank (*cf.* Torelli 1997b). The main person on the right hand wagon is regrettably damaged. Torelli (1997a) has interpreted the figure as a woman, seeing the tip of a back braid near the figure's back. But this detail is too uncertain to allow us to interpret them as a bride and a groom approaching each other. Anyway, behind the two persons sitting on each wagons, two small figures are keeping a big jar or situla in balance, or protecting it. One more person is running behind the wagon, and another one is as if crawling by its side—whether they are helpers or adversaries is difficult to decide, but their status is decidedly lower.

The wagons are approaching the central area ('B'), marked by a pole (perhaps a fence), on which a boy is standing, perhaps angling, while two others are perhaps fishing with net.¹² A frieze of waterfowls between these probably indicates a shore

11 Gentili 1987, and following him I have elaborated the idea (1998:71 n. 9) that they would be sheep of the long-legged and big-horned 'prehistoric' breed which still exist on islands in peripheral areas of Northern Europe and North Atlantic. Their fleece does not need shearing, but plucking and picking up. But, detail pictures show that not all these animals fit that description, their horns have too many branches.

12 Gentili 1987 interprets the boys occupied with washing and carding wool and arranging it into rolls ready for spinning.

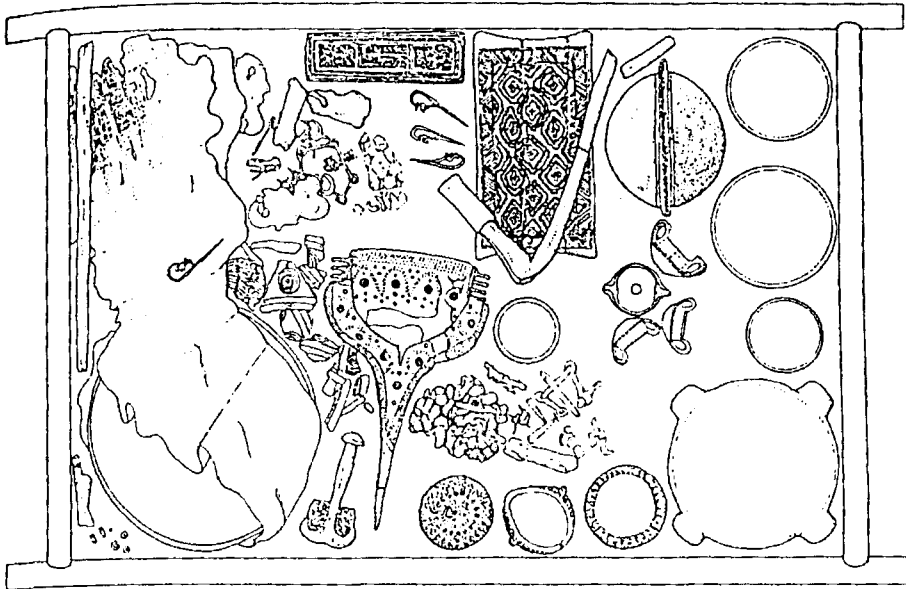


Fig. 2. Verucchio, the Lippi necropolis, tomb 89, plan of the big wooden box containing the cinerary urn and the grave goods. The throne was found on top of the box. Ca. 650-600 BC. Verucchio, Museo Civico Archeologico (from Malnati and Manfredi 1991)

or a riverbank—an *emporium* by the Marecchia river, perhaps at a ford? There, two pairs of armed warriors supervise on both sides the very centre of the scene, where division of meat, hides or other goods is taking place. As to the helmets of the warriors, they are of the late Villanovan type, similar to one of them found in the tomb in question (seen in Fig. 2). The helmet has the customary transversal, pointed comb of bronze sheet, while another helmet from the tomb has a comb of bristles.¹³

The wood-carver seems to have known very well how to give visual form to anthropological theories concerning the system of tribute and redistribution, controlled by chieftains.¹⁴ The presence of the warriors may raise the question, whether they represent the chief who controls the collective labour in a community, or whether all peaceful activities outside the village actually needed armed guards because of raiding typical of pastoral societies (*cf.* Lincoln 1981).

It may be no coincidence that the village itself is shown in the upper register ('C'), and the surrounding world in the lower zone, Verucchio's location on a hill-

13 *Cf.* Torelli 1997a:75-76; for helmets of many provenances at Verucchio, Cristofani 1997a:188.

14 *Cf.* e.g. Lincoln 1981, with further refs., *id.* 1989:75, 219-20. At times these theories do make sense when interpreting archaeological finds.

top taken into consideration. But this is also a recurrent way of reading images, from bottom to top, in early Etruscan imagery.¹⁵

Also the village is surrounded on either side by wilderness (at least the animals do not look more domesticated), and the two huts mark the limit. Here and there, e.g. on the roofs, there are some small 'genderless' figures, perhaps children, but the rest of the persons can be defined as women because of the long braids. The birds on the roof may either represent living birds, or rather decorated ridge-poles like those depicted on clay- and bronze hut urns.¹⁶

All the women are in activity. Two pairs of women are cooking or pestling grain in front of the two big huts.¹⁷ There is a possibility that they are imagined to be inside, and that everything happening between the two hut gables is supposed to take place indoors, but I continue the description according to how the scenes are actually represented. Between the houses there are two women spinning, and in the very centre of the village there are two pairs of vertical looms, high and imposing. In front of the looms, on solid stands, weavers are seated on chairs, with their feet resting on foot-stools. The cloth itself is patterned with the recurrent motif of the time, duck-stemmed boats (These boats have a long history in the European Bronze-Age). The height of the looms has probably been exaggerated in order to show the woven fabric, which would otherwise have been rolled around the top beam and invisible. Some ape-like figures on top of the looms may belong to the pattern of the fabric, but they could also be children lifting groups of warp yarn to make the pattern.¹⁸

So, what we have here is a perfect description of how the world is made up, and how its inhabitants have their fields of competences according to sex, age, and rank, but all necessary and important for the whole community. This is a chair worthy a chieftain¹⁹—or perhaps his wife.

15 E.g. the Bologna *tintinnabulum*, fig. 3; cf. Maggiani 1996, a proposal for the interpretation of the metope decorations on a stepped nenfro slab from Tarquinia.

16 E.g. the well-known bronze hut urn from Vulci (Massa-Pairault 1996:39).

17 Gentili 1987 sees them dyeing yarn, and this has been followed by many, cf. Pairault-Massa 1996:63, Nielsen 1998:71-72. Gentili thinks the women are inside the huts, but at least dyeing is a work which is best done outdoors.

18 In 1999 a team of Chinese silk damast weavers showed their skills at the Danish National Museum, where a huge loom was installed. The male weaver was working on the floor level at the horizontal loom, into which a vertical construction was joined, and on top of the latter, about 3-4 meters up, a light-weight girl was balancing while doing her demanding work with the warp.

19 In fact, several Etruscan chamber tombs have such chairs carved in the rock, and normally they appear in pairs, both for the *paterfamilias* and the *materfamilias* (latest e.g. Prayon 1998). Sassatelli (1996) thinks that the chair would very well have been placed in the antechamber of a chieftain's house, where guests and clients were received.

But, who was the chair made for, and by whom? In later times in many rural communities in Europe, *e.g.* in Northern Scandinavia,²⁰ bridegrooms were supposed to show their skills by giving finely carved weaving equipment as gifts to their brides—and the brides were supposed to use them when preparing their trousseau, and later on in their married life.²¹

Drawing from such ethnological parallels, I suggest that the chair would have been a wedding present, or part of a bridegroom's contribution to the household furniture. Whether he had carved the chair himself or let someone else to do it,²² our bridegroom wished to draw attention to his own male identity as a member of the elite, and to describe the male contribution to the economy of the community, but at the same time giving proper credit to the female occupation of spinning and weaving.

In fact, in this period, carpentry tools often appear in very rich male tombs (Nielsen 1998:72 n. 11 with refs.), which means that woodcarving was not at all degrading for elite men, as little as spinning and weaving were for women. Odysseus and Penelope come into mind as high-status master carpenters and weavers, and, in fact, both activities were excellent occasions for story-telling.

But who was buried in the tomb, a man or a woman, or both? This is not quite evident from the grave goods (Fig. 2), and the bones (as far as I know) have not been well enough preserved to permit an analysis.²³ The chair was placed on top of the big wooden box containing the cremation urn and all the grave goods. These included mainly male objects and nothing connected with spinning and weaving, the normal female grave goods ever since the Villanovan period. In addition to two different kinds of helmets, there were an axe, horse equipment, banquet service, amber and other ornaments, but of types prevalently found in male tombs, although the dividing line is difficult to draw. Even the fan, whose beautifully carved shaft is preserved, was no female prerogative in this period (Guldager Bilde 1994), although its relatively small size might point to a woman.²⁴ The large

20 With all these parallels from the northernmost Europe I am not implying that the contacts (direct or indirect) established in the amber-trade period into which the Verucchio throne belongs, would have been conserved in the North ever since, as if in a refrigerator. But, thinly populated, peripheral areas do conserve cultural features forgotten long ago in more progressive areas, and there domestic modes of production have been a necessary supplement to traded commodities. This also gives people a basic sense of quality and appreciation of handwork.

21 Much material in Scandinavian museums, *e.g.* at the National Museum in Helsinki.

22 The fragment from the tomb Moroni 26 (Sassatelli 1996:261 fig. 16) seems to be made by the same carpenter, so we are probably dealing with a purchased piece of furniture.

23 Unlike other organic materials, the bones from the Verucchio tombs are badly preserved. However, there was only one cinerary urn. On the gravegoods, see *e.g.* Gentili 1987, Malnati and Manfredi 1991, Torelli 1997a:55.

24 Men are not actually represented fanning themselves, this is done by servants waving heavy fans. The feathers or leaves of the fan have of course made them more imposing.

wooden 'coffin' was covered by a woollen garment, probably of reddish colour (purple?), which might point to a woman, but this is not certain either.²⁵

It is even possible that the grave contained a double burial—perhaps two men, or, why not, a man and a woman together?²⁶ In fact, Etruscan women's tombs from the Orientalising period do exhibit arms and armour, horses and wagons, so why not even a helmet of her own?²⁷ Be that as it may, the chair could well have been a chieftain's 'throne', but also the widow's counter-gift to her dead husband, from whom she had got it—an analogy to spindle-whorls, sometimes given as secondary gifts to men's graves.

Many other graves at Verucchio have yielded remains of textiles, too, since cremation urns were often 'clad' in clothes. These confirm the ability of the weavers in making very fine fabrics and elaborate patterns. The cloth was not necessarily woven to measure, but cut and sewn to fit the shape of the body. Woven patterns also influenced carpentry, as we can see from the chequered diamond twill pattern, imitated in the carvings of the foot-stool found in our tomb (seen Fig. 2; cf. von Eles 1994:figs. 36, 53). We may take this as a sign of male recognition of the weavers' skills (cf. Scheid and Svenbro 1996).

From the tombs in Verucchio, amber jewellery of astounding quantity and quality have been found, locally made by extremely skilled artisans, who utilised amber imported from the Baltic area (*Dono delle Eliadi* 1994). Not only jewellery was made of amber, but sometimes also spindles (or distaffs), probably too fragile to be used for other purposes than as mere status symbols (cf. Martelli 1995). The wealth of Verucchio seems to have been based on far-reaching exchange. Perhaps the textiles were Verucchio's own contribution to the trade, so women had certainly earned their share of the luxury goods.

The tree-trunk throne was used not only for ceremonial purposes (cf. the Murlo chairs, Fig. 3), but also for such domestic activities as wool-working. From a rich female tomb from Bologna were not only found many items of gold jewellery and amber necklaces, but also a bronze rattle-pendant, a *tintinnabulum*, an object often found in girls' and women's graves. When the pendant was cleansed about 1970, it proved to have previously unnoticed reliefs, showing wool-working women (Fig. 4).²⁸ Below, we see two women sitting on tree-trunk thrones fixing carded

25 Patrizia von Eles told on a guided tour through the Verucchio museum for the Forlì congress excursionists in Sept. 1996 that coloured textiles were mainly found in women's graves, while men's robes were normally undyed. I have greatly profited from her inspiring presentation of the museum.

26 Torelli 1997b. Cf. the two young warriors buried side by side in the Orientalising grave of Casal Marittimo (*Principi guerrieri* 1999).

27 E.g. the important reassessment of the Regolini Galassi tomb of Cerveteri, by Colonna and Di Paolo 1997, with refs.

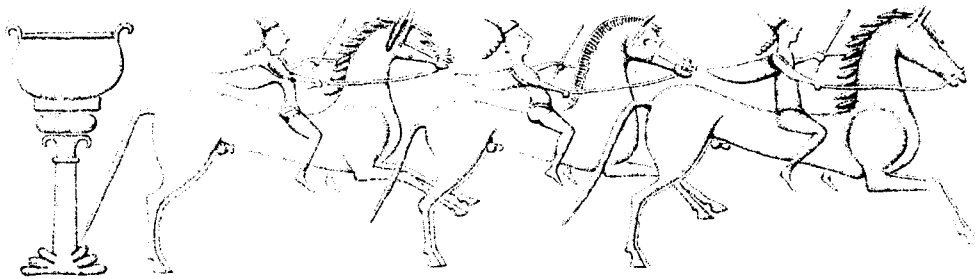
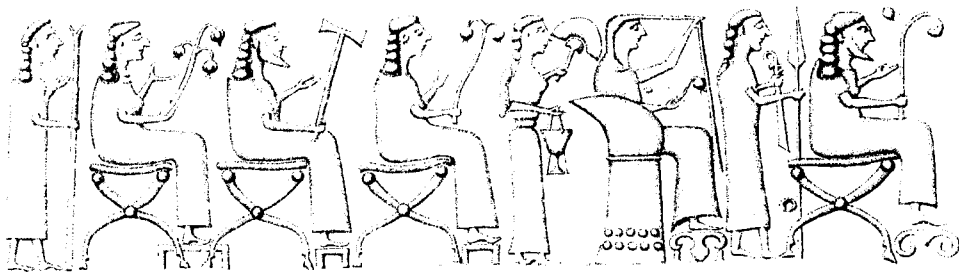
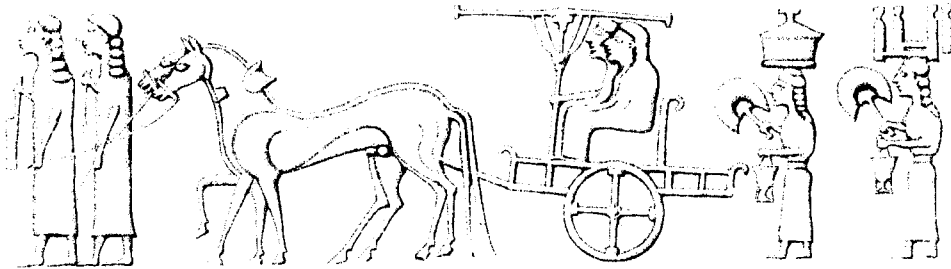
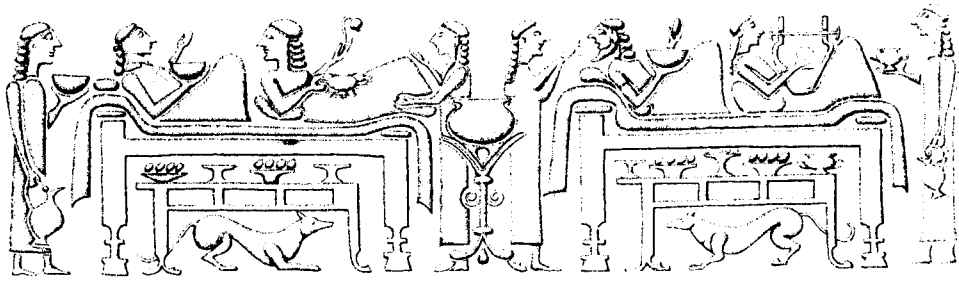


Fig. 3. The four types of frieze plaques from Poggio Civitate, Murlo, ca. 580 BC. From above: banquet, journey on wagon, reunion (note that the most important woman, the second from the right, is sitting on a round-backed throne), horse race. Murlo, Antiquarium (from Rathje 1993:136)

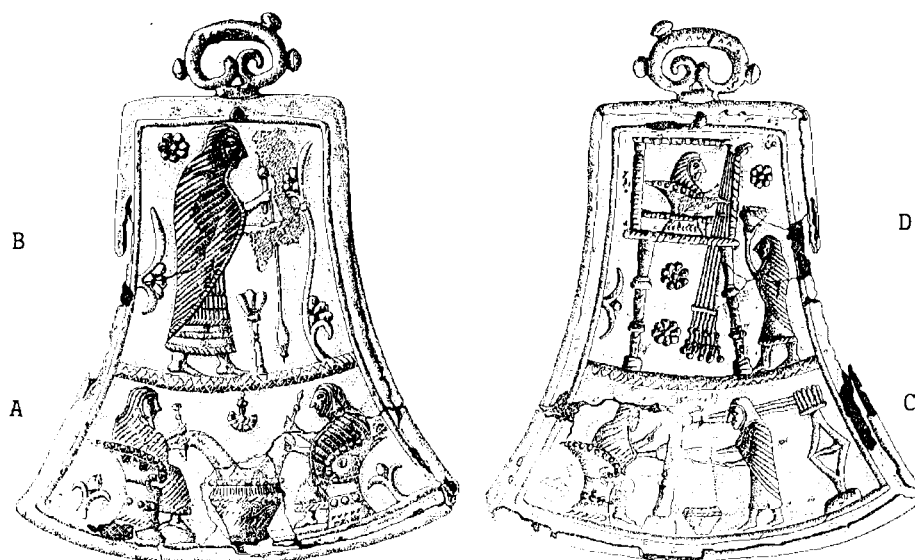


Fig. 4. Bronze tintinnabulum, from tomb 5 of the Arsenale necropolis, ca. 600 BC. Stages of textile work: A) carding, B) spinning, C) warping, D) weaving. Bologna, Museo Civico Archeologico (drawing from Morigi Govi 1971)

wool on distaffs. Above, a woman is spinning while walking, thus manifesting her female virtue of never having idle hands. On the other side of the pendant, two women are fixing the warp yarn, a very time-consuming and demanding task, which requires much attention to counting and precision. Then, the final stage of weaving, done by one more woman sitting on a tree-trunk chair, placed high up on a scaffolding in front of a warp-weighted loom—comfortable but quite risky.²⁹

This means that in the seventh and early sixth centuries BC women at the loom were still a reality also among the elite. Rests of looms found in dwellings and residences of the period testify to weaving as a home industry. But, spinning and weaving had also become the very symbol of domesticity, in contrast to men's mobility, and especially a bridal symbol for girls preparing their trousseau (*cf.* Bietti Sestieri 1996:123). In this respect Etruscan women do not differ the least from

28 Morigi Govi 1971. Latest, Massa-Pairault 1996:66, Torelli 1997a:60, figs. 47-48, Nielsen 1998:70, pl. viii.

29 The podia and scaffoldings are common features for the representations of the Verucchio and the Bologna looms. In northern Scandinavia the warp-weighted looms have survived to our days, but there the initial stage of weaving is normally done when standing on a bench in order to reach the top of the loom (Hoffmann 1964). The well-known black-figure lekythos in New York shows two women standing on the ground when weaving (*e.g.* cover of Barber 1994).

their Greek or Roman sisters. Tanaquil, the wife of the first Etruscan king in Rome, Tarquinius Priscus, was recorded to have woven the first *tunica recta*, and her distaff and wool were shown for centuries in a temple founded by her.³⁰ Nor is Livy's account about the spinning Lucretia at all anachronistic (1.57-59), so there is no need to take all stories about spinning elite women entirely as products of the Augustan back-to-basics campaign (so Ogilvie 1965:222).

But also long after the craft had been taken over by professional weavers, male and female, textile work continued to be the very symbol of female virtue.³¹ That textile work may also be fun, an intellectual and creative challenge, or a necessary method for saving money or make an honourable way of living, is not the main reason why girls are taught it in the 20th century. Just take a look at the prefaces to school books for needlework classes. The main paedagogic aim is invariably something else than to train the girls' artistic talents or practice applied mathematics. Instead, by learning knitting and sewing girls are being 'domesticated,' they learn to be patient and diligent, neat and tidy. The neatness of their handwork is simply considered a mirror of their capacities as wives and housekeepers—to check their needlework was once enough to judge their character. But this evaluation was left to other women, future in-laws who examined the trousseau, not the bridegroom.

Now all this has lost its real economic importance (although it is still practical to master some elementary mending), and 'spinster' has got the meaning 'unmarried woman.' The Verucchio and Bologna ladies were probably doing many other things, but it was their capacity of producing textiles—not motherhood, for example—which became the symbol of their womanhood.³² Real needs in a society are in constant change, while the ideas connected to the needs/objects tend to halt behind, and turn into abstractions. At the outset, the connection between things and their meaning is quite concrete, there is no place for symbolical expressions. But, if the connection is totally lost, the symbol loses its power.

30 Varro, in Plut. *Quaest.Rom.* 30; Plin. *HN* 8.194. On the tradition, Torelli 1984:31-33, 104, 136; Rallo, in *Donne* 1989:31 n. 101.

31 Cf. for the Roman period, Larsson Lovén 1998, or the spinning and lace-making women in Dutch 17th-century painting, Franits 1993.

32 I recently heard in the Danish radio an interview with a young Danish man, who 'in search of his limits' (according to the current expression in a well-fare society) had passed a couple of years in Siberia, and survived among the local people as a hunter under extreme circumstances. He became aware of how much his mentality had changed, when he began to think about staying there and marrying a girl. The most important criterium for the choice was not her looks, or whether she was pleasant company or not, but her capacity of sewing warm fur clothes and making food out of nothing, *i.e.* survival strategies.

II. Greek myth as symbol among the Etruscans: parallel stories

Returning to the topic I initially had intended to explore, we might call the chapter 'Etruscan warp, Greek weft.' In Etruria proper recognisable Greek myths entered the imagery, with which the Etruscan aristocrats were surrounding themselves, about 700 BC, more or less at the same time when the art of writing was introduced. The Etruscans never abandoned the local imagery describing life and after-life, but Greek myths took an increasing part of their imagery, not only decorations on imported vases, and on vases made by immigrant artisans (as the famous 'Blinding of Polyphemos' on the crater made in Cerveteri and signed by Aristonothos), but also on entirely local products.³³ One of the most prestigious import vases, the François crater from Chiusi, was a real check-list of Greek mythology, and, for safety, furnished with explanations of the figured scenes.³⁴

Already at an early stage Greek myths must have given the Etruscans occasions for self-identification, they belonged to the civilised peoples who knew what Greek myth was all about. However, the many deviations from 'canonic' Greek texts have often been taken as signs of Etruscan ignorance about the myths. Only recently scholars have increasingly realised that one cannot expect Etruscans to have followed texts which had not yet been written down, but circulated in many versions, also in the Greek world, and kept doing so for centuries.³⁵ There are many examples of badly documented versions of Greek myths which have found their way to Etruscan art, e.g. mirror decorations, which are particularly valuable because inscriptions often identify the subjects.³⁶

Naturally, those myths were preferred, which gave sense in the local context, in the specific area of life—or death—for which the object or building was designed. The Etruscans even accepted stories told about themselves, as the metamorphosis of Tyrrhenian pirates turned into dolphins by Dionysus (Martelli 1987:no. 130).

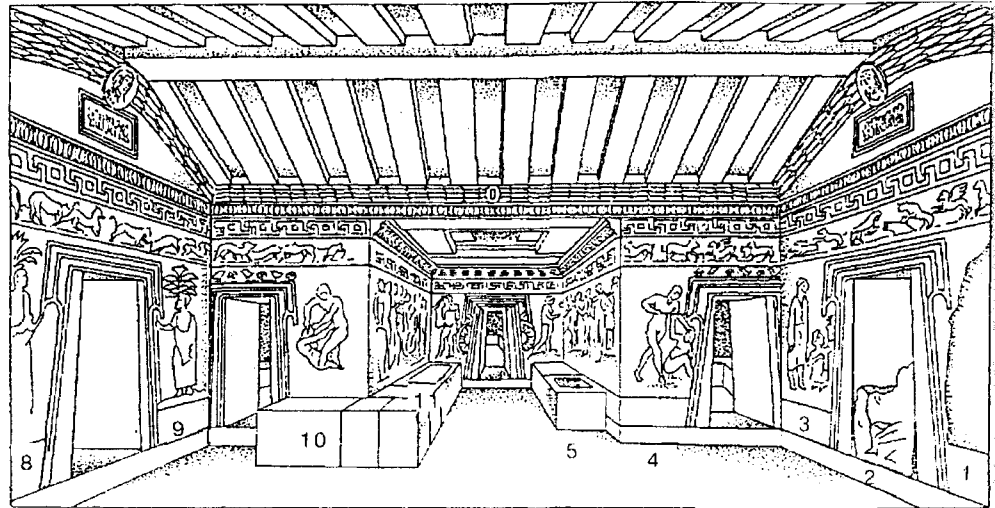
Towards the end of the sixth century, Etruscan monarchy came to an end in Rome, and so it did in Etruria, with the sole difference that there the power re-

33 The earliest candidate for a mythological representation from Etruria, is a locally made, Geometric oinochoe from Vulci, ca. 750-725 BC, possibly with the crane dance of Theseus and Ariadne (London, British Museum, inv. 49.5-18.18; Martelli 1996:611). For other early mythological representations in Etruria, see e.g. Rizzo and Martelli 1989, Maggiani 1996; Martelli 1996:611-613; Massa-Pairault 1996:77-88. For the Aristonothos vase, see e.g. Martelli 1987:no. 40, *Ulisse* 1996:45, Skafte Jensen 1996:146. For the problem in general, see e.g. Colonna 1989, *Le mythe grec dans l'Italie antique* 1999. The share of Greek motifs or objects in Etruria is, however, much greater in publications and museum exhibitions than in archaeological excavations. I can assure that it is quite possible to excavate for years without finding anything related to Greek myths at all—but that may be the case also in Greece.

34 Latest Mackay, Harrison and Masters 1999.

35 Cf. Skafte Jensen 1996, 1997. The same applied to Greek art, cf. Snodgrass 1998.

36 E.g. van der Meer 1995, De Puma 1998.



The numbers refer to the following scenes:

Left:

Right:

Greek mythical soothsayers
in the Hades:

Family members buried in the
tomb:

6 Sisyphus and Amphiaraus
7 Ajax and Cassandra
8 Phoenix
9 Nestor

1 Family member/ancestor
2 Family member/ancestor
3 Vel Saties and Arnza taking
omens (?)

Greek myth:

Etrusco-Roman legend:

Duels between equals, both will die:

10 Eteocles and Polyneices

4 Marce Camitlnas and Cneve
Tarchunie Rumach

Human sacrifice after war:

11 Sacrifice of Trojan
prisoners at the funeral of
Patroclus, himself present
as a shadow

5 Blood-dripping struggles
between Avle and Caile Vipinas
and Macstrna

Fig. 5. The François tomb, Vulci, ca. 350-325 BC. The pictorial program divides the central 'atrium' in two directions. Lengthwise, there are two almost symmetrical halves, the right one dedicated to ancestors and local 'heroes', the left one to Greek mythological ones. Across this division comes another one, the foremost part of the 'atrium' showing on both sides persons with prophetic gifts, while the back of the room shows ritual killing of captured enemies.

Fig. 5a. View through the 'atrium' (from Sgubini Moretti 1989:176 fig. 133).

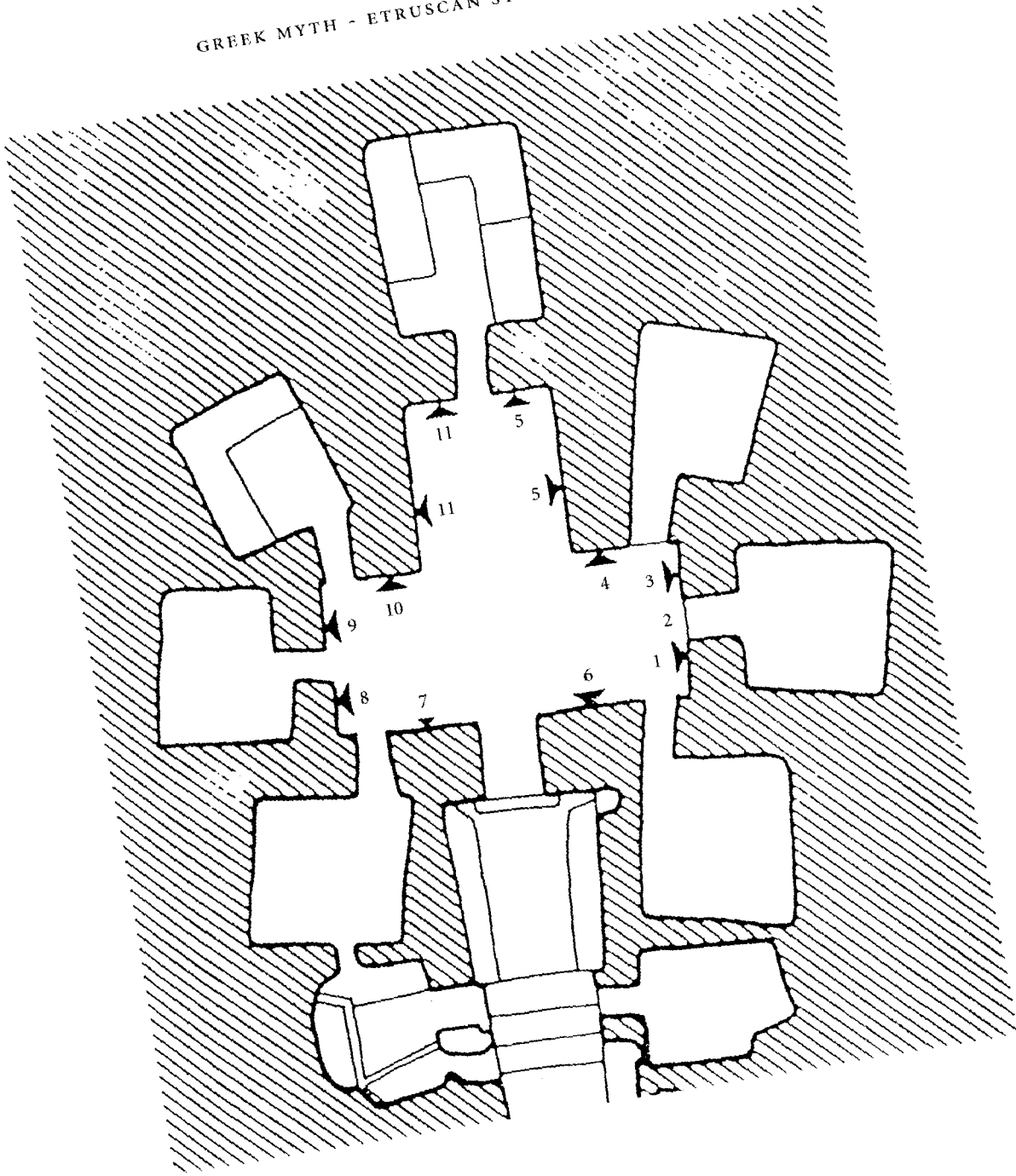


Fig. 5b. Plan of the tomb

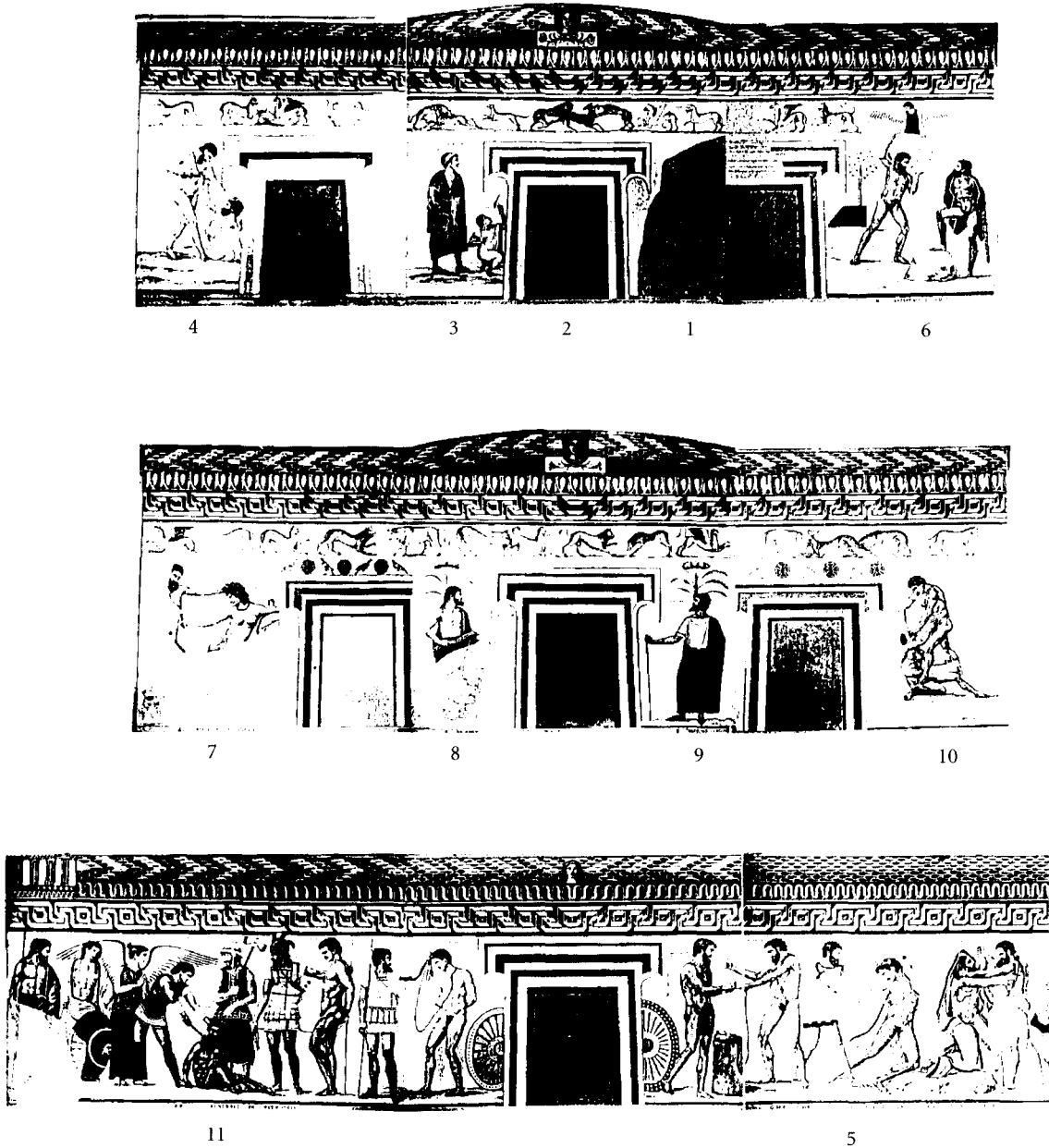


Fig. 5c. Carlo Ruspi's facsimile copies of the wall paintings in the 'atrium,' not quite reliable in detail.
 Above: right and left half of the backmost part of the tomb
 Centre: right side of the central room
 Below: left side of the central room
 (from *Tomba François* 1987:180).

mained in Etruscan hands. The 'palaces' of Murlo³⁷ and Acquarossa were destroyed and their remains carefully buried in the ground, obviously following an 'un-founding rite',³⁸ and the sites were abandoned. Also the excavations in the urban area of Cerveteri have revealed traces of a similar upheaval: a *regia*-like residence was destroyed and substituted by a meeting place (Cristofani 1997b). Similar finds are likely to turn up in other places, too, if the circumstances permit excavations on the right spot.

No contemporary pictorial representations of such social and political disruptions survive, but, although the events during the monarchic period may have been subject to *damnatio memoriae*, they were not forgotten altogether. Long before Livy, about 350/325 BC, the paintings of the well-known François tomb at Vulci (Fig. 5a, b, c) constitute the oldest surviving source for the struggles between the brothers Vipina/Vibenna, and a certain Macstarna, whom emperor Claudius in his speech in the Roman senate in 48 AD told was identical with Servius Tullius.³⁹

In the François tomb there is an interesting juxtaposition of the more or less legendary, Etrusco-Roman historical past, the sixth century BC, and the decidedly mythical past, the sacrifice of the Trojan prisoners at the funeral of Patroclus.⁴⁰ The left half of the central room shows episodes from the Greek myth, and the right half analogous happenings in the Etrusco-Roman history. In the foremost part of the central room, to the left are shown Greek mythical soothsayers, by now residing in Hades, and to the right persons buried in the tomb: the founder of the tomb, Vel Saties himself and probably some of his ancestors and his offspring.⁴¹

So, we have an example of a pictorial program, which expresses the cyclical conception of time, a fundamental feature in Etruscan culture: the past, the present, and the future were interdependable, similar actions were believed to repeat themselves cyclically, and therefore they were predictable.⁴² Among the Saties family, we might speak about an instrumentalisation of the past as well as that of

37 Rathje 1993.

38 Edlund-Berry 1994. De Grummond 1997 has recently questioned both the ritual burial of the site and the very function of the complex itself, proposing it to be a multi-functional market place controlled by a central authority, similar to phenomena in the same period in Rome.

39 For the sources, see e.g. *Tomba François* 1987:225-42 (including Claudius' speech written down on bronze tablets found in Lyon); Ampolo 1988:205-13, Briquel 1990.

40 Coarelli 1983, widely followed by other scholars, latest Holliday 1993, Flower 1996:213 n. 140 with refs., 215-16. The Trojan prisoners also appear elsewhere in Etruscan art, cf. Maggiani (*Artigianato artistico* 1985:208-12).

41 The founder of the tomb, Vel Saties, is perhaps not shown observing a bird's flight in order to take omens before a battle, the *opinio communis* which has latest been challenged by Weber-Lehmann 2000: Arzna is not a dwarf, but a child with his pet bird held in a string. Then, the child as such would represent the future generations. Yet, Vel Saties' eyes are still turned towards the sky.

the future (*cf.* Lincoln 1989:esp. 38-50). By now the direction for reading images, from right to left (the same as in writing) had been established in Etruscan art,⁴³ so we may conclude that the family history and the local past were the point of departure, into which the Greek myth is projected, backwards.⁴⁴

We do not know of other representations of Macstarna/Servius Tullius, but the Vipina brothers are lurking here and there in later Etruscan art. On an incised and inscribed mirror from Bolsena,⁴⁵ Avle and Caile Vipina are preparing to capture Cacū, an Apollon-like soothsayer, whose young assistant Artile is writing down his revelations, perhaps *carmina acherontica*.

The legend of the capture of Cacū by the Vipina brothers was not an episode which was forgotten later on, either, their exploits had developed into a legend, and all kinds of Herculean labours were attributed to them.⁴⁶ The previously mentioned mirror helps us to identify the same protagonists on some early second-century cinerary urns from Chiusi and Volterra.⁴⁷ I just give one example (Fig. 6), where the capture of Cacū is part of an iconographic program, the three most prestigious cinerary urns designed for the family tomb of the Purnis near Chiusi, all three urns being executed by a sculptor, whose training in up-to-date Hellenistic art is evident.

The same 'Purni Master,' as I propose to call him, utilised almost the same composition for another urn from the same tomb, but this time depicting a Greek myth (Fig. 7).⁴⁸ Orestes is sitting on his father Agamemnon's tomb, tormented by

42 Coarelli 1983, with refs. to Marta Sordi's work. *Cf.* Nielsen 1999. It has been discussed, whether a similar parallelism of time, mythical past and contemporary actions, already have been present in the images of the Tragliatella oinochoe from ca. 600 BC, *cf.* Menichetti 1994:57 (contra, d'Agostino, disc. in *Modi e funzioni* 1995:244-45), Massa-Pairault 1996:80-81, Torelli 1997a:29-30.

43 *Cf.* Small 1992:55-56. The direction of 'reading' *e.g.* tomb pictures is a very important key to the proper understanding of them, as shown *e.g.* by Roncalli 1997, 2001.

44 This is why I have changed the numbering of the scenes in the François tomb, beginning from the entrance, and not from the back chamber, although this is what the spectator sees when entering the tomb.

45 *E.g.* Small 1979, 1982, *Tomba François* 1987:242, *LIMC*, s.v. Cacū.

46 Here are no allusions to Cacū as a cattle-thief, as in the Roman legend 'Cacus captured by Hercules,' modelled on the Greek myth of Herakles and Geryon. *Cf.* Small 1982, Bremmer and Horsfall 1987.

47 *Cf.* Small 1982. The urn Florence MA 5801 has now been proved to come from Volterra: Bocci Pacini 1997:365.

48 Nielsen 1996a:no. 28. In fact, the composition was created for 'Orestes and Electra at the tomb of Agamemnon,' a well established composition in Southern Italian vase painting and tomb sculpture. The compositions are so close that scholars have had difficulties in distinguishing the subjects from each others on Etruscan urns, *e.g.* the Copenhagen Purni urn has almost invariably been interpreted as Cacū and the Vibennas.



Fig. 6. Cacū captured by the Vipina brothers, Chiusine alabaster urn from the Purni tomb, ca. 210-180 BC. Florence MA 74233 (from Cateni and Fiaschi 1984:pl. iv)

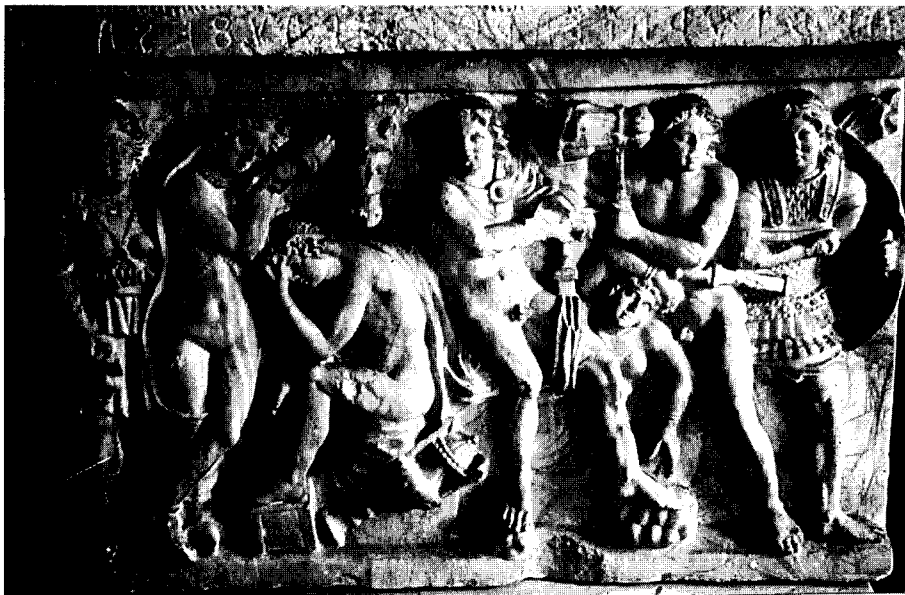


Fig. 7. Oresteia in one glimpse, Chiusine alabaster urn from the Purni tomb, ca. 210-180 BC. Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, H.I.N. 61 (photo Marjatta Nielsen)

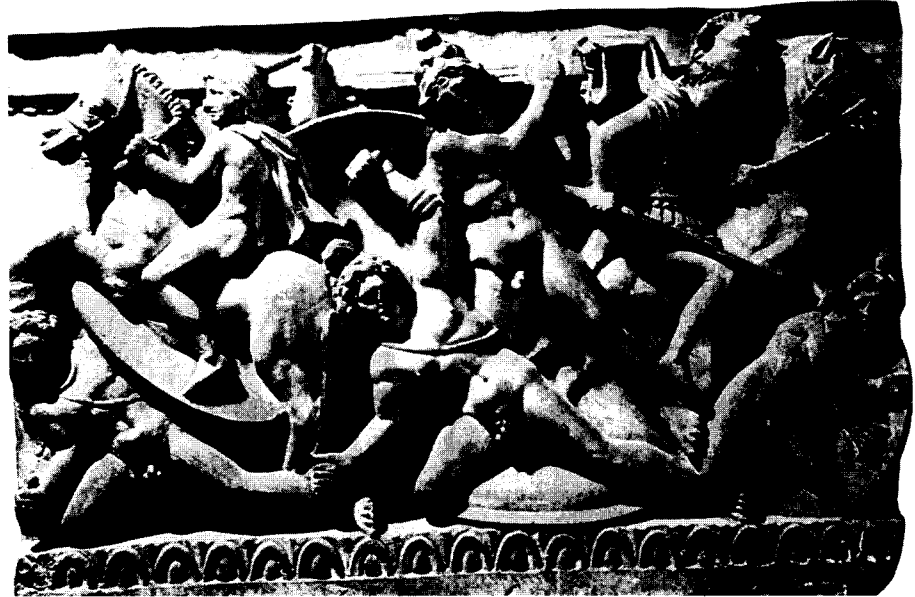


Fig. 8. Battle scene, Chiusine alabaster urn from the Purni tomb, ca. 210-180 BC. Florence MA 74232 (from Cateni and Fiaschi 1984:pl. vii)

plans of revenge, put into his mind by Apollon. The future developments of the story are told to the right. The sword which Apollon is 'casually' leaning on, points towards the breast of Clytaimnestra, who is foreseeing her own death in a nightmare—at least this Sophoclean version of the story fits best to the scene.⁴⁹ Again an example of how different time levels, past, present and future, were expressed in a single scene.⁵⁰

The third relief making part of the iconographical program of the Purni tomb gives a generic battle-scene (Fig. 8), with many loans from 'a heroic battle' involving an Alexander-like hero.⁵¹ Here, we might be dealing with any adversaries against each others—only one of the heroes is cuirassed and therefore 'civilised.' In

49 Else it is Euripides and his Hellenistic and Roman followers who gave the subjects to Etruscan urn reliefs, e.g. Brunn and Körte 1-2 (1870-96). All kinds of versions and specific moments of the story of the murder of Agamemnon and what followed were common subjects on Etruscan cinerary urns in the second century BC, reflecting the popularity of the theme also in Hellenistic and early Roman theatre, cf. Massa-Pairault 1985, 1992, Nielsen 1993.

50 The predictions and their fulfilment have been doubled in the relief of another Chiusine urn at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek (Nielsen 1996a:no. 31), for which I have now presented a new interpretation, 'Hecabe's and Cassandra's predictions about Paris' fate and the outburst of the Trojan war' (Nielsen 2000). In recent years the multiple time levels in Etruscan art have been increasingly recognised, e.g. Harari 1995, De Puma 1998.

51 Florence MA 74232, e.g. Pairault 1985:pl. 26.

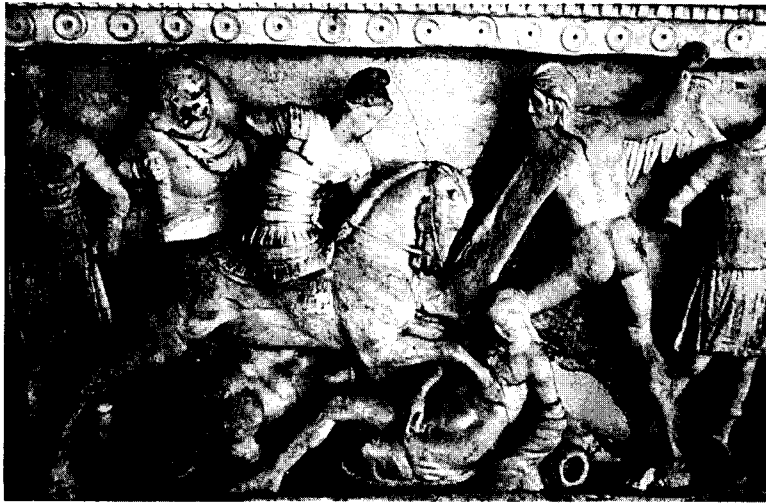


Fig. 9. Galatomachia, alabaster urn from Volterra, ca. 180-150 BC. Volterra, Museo Guarnacci 427 (photo Marjatta Nielsen)



Fig. 10. Centauromachia, alabaster urn from Volterra, ca. 180-150 BC. Volterra, Museo Guarnacci 291 (photo Marjatta Nielsen)



Fig. 11. Death of Myrtilus, alabaster urn from Volterra, ca. 150-130 BC. Florence MA 93484 (from Cateni and Fiaschi 1984:pl. xii)

the third and second centuries (and later on) there was an endless row of wars and battles that involved also Etruscans, but in Etruscan representations we can never identify Romans (after all the only serious threat) as enemies—or Punes, for that sake, if we consider Etruscans by now as loyal allies to the Romans. Only ‘civilisation against barbarism.’

On some other urns from the same Purni tomb the adversaries are more precisely described, and they turn out to be Celts, old neighbours and at times even allies to the Etruscans, but turned to enemies, thanks to Roman interference.⁵² The gigantic Celtic warriors followed already in the second century BC the description later on canonised by Tacitus. The Celts became the very symbols of the inexorable, but honourable death, and Galatomachia became a standard motif in Etruscan funerary art (Fig. 9). The Celts simply inherited the role of Centaurs (Fig. 10) and wild beasts as those who disturbed the order created by gods and men, and appearing for centuries in the iconographic programs of the Siphnian treasury, of the Parthenon and elsewhere in the Greek world. Historical events got mythical character (cf. Graf 1993), while Greek myth was used as a metaphor for historical events: they were interchangeable.

The second century saw Greek myths as the overwhelming majority of the subject matter on Etruscan urns⁵³—as well as that of tragedy literature in Rome. The

52 Nielsen 1996b, with refs. About Celtic questions in Italy, see also Bandelli 1988, Dobesch 1992.

53 E.g. contributions in *Caratteri dell'ellenismo nelle urne etrusche* 1977, Massa-Pairault 1985, 1992; Nielsen 1993.



Fig. 12. *The Seven at the walls of Thebes, staged in front of the Porta all'Arco at Volterra, ca. 40-30 BC. Volterra, Museo Guarnacci 371 (from Laviosa 1965:no. 29)*

'Death of Myrtilus' on a Volterranean urn relief (Fig. 11; Massa-Pairault 1996:6) may serve as a visual expression of this 'raving Hellenism', a trend which continued down to the early first century BC. No wonder, then, that after 80 BC, when Sulla's siege of Volterra was in fresh mind, one of the recurrent relief motifs was 'the Seven against Thebes' (Nielsen 1993:339). Again, Greek myth served as a reference to contemporary events.

Volterra remained the last Etruscan stronghold of political and cultural resistance against the Romans. In 41 BC, Perugia had been besieged and conquered by Octavian, who ritually sacrificed 300 local noblemen, thus 'referring' to the old Etruscan—and mythical Greek—custom of treating war prisoners (of which we already have seen examples). After that, the last Perugine urn-sculptors seem to have become unemployed and moved on to Volterra, where Etruscans were still living and dying in the old Etruscan way (Nielsen 1989). One of the Perugine masters probably made a relief, being quite specific when describing the walls of Thebes: he furnished the city gate with three heads, similar to the still extant city-gate of Volterra (Fig. 12). So, Greek myth served not only as a frame of reference

for the civilised man in general, but it also gave a self-identification as being an Etruscan.

However, the Romans and Augustus finally did get their will and convinced also the last Etruscans to join the big cause. The Greek myths disappeared even from Volterra, as did accomplished artists, and Rome dictated the models for art and architecture. By now, however, also Rome had been thoroughly impregnated by Greek art and culture (*cf.* Hölscher 1993).

With this rapid survey of symbolical uses of Greek myth as ‘parallel stories’ among the Etruscans, I have tried to show that, when studying Classical Antiquity and its inheritance, we should not understand the Etruscans (or other pre-Roman peoples) as blind alleys not worth a closer look, just because their languages, and therefore, their literature, have vanished. The archaeological evidence from pre-Roman Italy shows that long before the Romans conquered the Greek world, Greek culture and myth had voluntarily been adopted, thoroughly understood, and adapted to suit local cultural needs, thus paving the way for their success—and further symbolical uses—in the Roman world and in later European civilisation.

* Additional note: When the article was in second proofs, the reassessment of the Verrucchio tomb and throne appeared: *Guerriero e sacerdote. Autorità e comunità del ferro a Verrucchio. La Tomba del Trono*, Patrizia von Eles (ed.). Firenze 2002. The tomb belonged to an adult male and has to be dated already to the early orientalisising period, ca. 700 BC. The carvings on the throne are not strictly symmetrical. In the lower register the persons in the centre, between the warriors, have back-braids, *i.e.* women, as well as the one sitting on the wagon to the right. On the left-hand wagon a woman is holding the jar in balance. In the upper register, the duck motifs belong to the construction of the looms. Consequently, there are many changes to the ‘picture of the world’ given here.

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Mythe et tragédie dans l'*Alceste* d'Euripide

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A PARTIR d'une lecture de l'*Alceste* d'Euripide, je me propose d'examiner, sur un exemple particulier, les rapports du mythe à la tragédie, en mettant en évidence la place et la fonction du mythe dans l'aventure d'Admète, telle qu'elle apparaît sur le théâtre.

Admète, roi de Thessalie, a reçu d'Apollon, en cadeau de remerciement pour son hospitalité, le don de ne pas mourir à son heure, s'il trouvait quelqu'un pour le remplacer. Il ne trouve personne, pas même ses parents âgés, sinon sa femme, Alceste. Mais Héraclès, de passage en Thessalie, et reçu à son tour en hôte par Admète, arrache la jeune femme à Thanatos, la mort, et la ramène à son époux. Tel est l'argument de la tragédie.

En cherchant à définir quelle place occupait le mythe dans la tragédie d'*Alceste*, j'ai été amenée à distinguer trois ensembles mythiques principaux que j'examinerai maintenant.

i - Le noyau thessalien. Il se constitue autour de la réputation d'hospitalité des Thessaliens, assumée dans la tragédie par Admète, l'ami et l'hôte d'Apollon et d'Héraclès. On la trouve par exemple attestée par Xénophon qui parle de Polydamas de Pharsale 'hospitalier et magnifique à la mode thessalienne'.¹ Elle est confirmée par les témoignages de la comédie (citée par Athénée 10.4,418c-d) qui moque leur goût de la bonne chère, voire leur gloutonnerie. Nous retrouverons ce thème. L'aventure d'Alceste se rattache à ce noyau par le lien entre Apollon et Admète, tel qu'il est rappelé au début de la tragédie par Apollon lui-même.

ii - Les mythes autour d'Asclépios, le héros foudroyé, fils d'Apollon et vainqueur de la mort avant d'être à son tour anéanti par Zeus. Il n'apparaît pas dans la tragédie, mais en est la cause lointaine, puisque c'est pour punir Apollon d'avoir vengé la mort de son fils que Zeus l'a exilé sur terre. Sur-

1 Xén. *Hell.* 6.1-3.

tout, il est évoqué à plusieurs reprises par le chœur, à des moments clé, comme celui qui a, seul dans le passé, ressuscité des morts, et a été, pour ce fait, puni par Zeus.

iii - Les mythes autour d'Héraclès, lui aussi héros et dieu. Il n'apparaît dans la tragédie que sous les traits du héros mortel qui va d'épreuve en épreuve. Mais il est comme le relais d'Asclépios: celui qu'annonce Apollon dans la fin du prologue et qui luttera efficacement contre Thanatos (64-71).

Ce qui traverse et unit ces trois ensembles, c'est le thème de la mort, refusée, affrontée, repoussée, vaincue et victorieuse, thème incarné dans l'histoire mythique du couple Alceste/Admète, séparé par la mort volontaire d'Alceste puis réuni par l'intervention d'Héraclès. Autour de ce thème central, de nombreuses lectures mettent l'accent sur le couple Alceste/Admète, pour en proposer des portraits psychologiques contrastés.² Tantôt elles soulignent la grandeur d'Alceste et son amour, et, inversement, la pusillanimité d'Admète, tantôt la froideur d'Alceste et l'évolution du caractère d'Admète confronté à l'épreuve. Les figures divines qui interviennent dans la tragédie se trouvent, par ces lectures, repoussées vers les confins et jouent les utilités: Apollon comme introducteur, Héraclès comme écho de la comédie attique du v^e siècle et caractéristique du 'drame satyrique' dont participerait cette tragédie.³ D'autres lectures, plus récentes, s'appuient sur une approche anthropologique du théâtre tragique, nous aurons l'occasion d'y faire référence.

En partant non plus des 'caractères' des personnages humains principaux mais de la structure de la tragédie qui enchâsse le drame et la mort d'Alceste entre deux références à la qualité d'hôte d'Admète, à sa philoxénie, une autre perspective se présente pour aborder la tragédie.

La mort d'Alceste est la conséquence indirecte du 'don' d'Apollon à Admète en échange de son hospitalité. Don 'imprudent,' il est censé faire le bonheur de son destinataire mais manque son but et fait son malheur. Le rachat se fera grâce à Héraclès, en reconnaissance de l'hospitalité accordée par Admète malgré les circonstances. Que ce motif fournisse un thème comique rappelant une des figures de l'Héraclès goinfre et bouffon n'interdit pas qu'il puisse être réemployé ici dans un autre contexte où Héraclès apparaît cette fois en combattant de la mort, ce qui renvoie à une autre des dimensions multiples de son mythe.

2 Conacher 1993:35-47 fait le point sur les différentes interprétations avancées et les problèmes posés par la tragédie. Il met quant à lui l'accent sur l'ironie vis à vis des attitudes et des croyances mises en scène. Sur cette interprétation voir notamment Smith 1960.

3 Cf. chez Bouvrie 1990:193-197 une analyse de cette problématique.

Héraclès double, bouffon et tragique, joyeux mangeur et affrontant la mort sous des formes diverses, voilà qui entre parfaitement dans la tradition qui le concerne. Cette lecture conduit aussi à considérer comme plus importante qu'on ne le fait souvent l'hospitalité d'Admète, dans l'économie de la tragédie. Ce respect des hôtes, qui est considéré comme une dimension essentielle de l'*eusebeia*, à côté du respect des dieux et des ancêtres ou des parents, est une composante essentielle de son personnage. C'est même ce qui le définit: il faut prendre au sérieux, si on accepte cette lecture, les derniers vers prononcés par Héraclès avant de prendre congé:

'Reste toujours fidèle à la justice (*dikaios*), respectueux des droits de l'hospitalité (*eusebei peri xenous*)' (1147-48).

Philoxenos, ce mot semble définir avant tout le personnage d'Admète dans la tragédie. L'hommage rendu par Héraclès répond au '*anêr hosios*', 'homme pieux', dont Apollon salue son hôte (*xenos*) dans le prologue (10). C'est pour sa *philoxenia* qu'il a été récompensé par Apollon, et c'est elle encore, après l'épisode d'Alceste, dont Héraclès fait l'éloge au terme de l'épreuve, au moment où il remet entre ses mains son épouse arrachée à la mort.⁴

Pour Platon (*Symp.* 79b-180), ou plutôt pour Phèdre, l'interlocuteur du *Banquet*, l'histoire d'Alceste est celle d'un amour exceptionnel, digne d'être donné en exemple, et dont la qualité est mise en évidence par le parallèle avec l'amour d'Orphée. Mais celui-ci ne soutient pas la comparaison avec Alceste: 'Au lieu d'avoir eu comme Alceste, le courage de mourir par amour, il a usé d'artifice pour pénétrer vivant chez Hadès.' Au yeux de Phèdre, c'est l'admiration des dieux pour l'amour d'Alceste qui a fait remonter son âme de l'Hadès. Mais cette vision platonicienne qui met au centre, avec le personnage d'Alceste, l'amour qu'elle porte à son mari, n'est pas celle d'Euripide.

Platon s'éloigne sur deux points de la tragédie montrée en 438 par Euripide. Premier point: Euripide ne place pas au centre de l'action l'acte d'Alceste qui a accepté de mourir à la place de son mari Admète, mais les conséquences de cet acte. Sa décision a été prise avant, dans un passé indéterminé. Ce que nous voyons sur le théâtre, c'est la mort d'Alceste, qui occupe les deux premiers épisodes, et le deuil d'Admète qui s'étend sur toute la tragédie, jusqu'à l'exode, précisément au vers 1120, au moment où Héraclès dévoile Alceste qu'il a ramenée du tombeau.

La deuxième différence, dans la tradition suivie par Platon, est que ce sont les dieux, sans qu'il précise davantage, qui ont renvoyé Alceste sur la terre, seule, précise Platon, parmi tous ceux qui ont accompli de belles actions, preuve, ajoute-t-il, du mérite à leurs yeux du dévouement et de la vertu qui ont Amour pour mo-

4 Cf. Bouvrie 1990:202 'The driving force of the action of death and resurrection is Admetis' virtue of hospitality (*poluxenia*) and its divine reward.'

bile. Dans la version d'Apollodore (*Bibl.* 1.9.15), c'est Koré en personne qui la renvoie. Que l'introduction d'Héraclès pour sauver Alceste de Thanatos soit ou non une invention d'Euripide (certains commentateurs l'attribuent à Phrynicos, mais rien ne subsiste de sa tragédie sur Alceste), c'est un point essentiel dans l'interprétation de la tragédie.⁵

Le paradoxe propre à l'*Alceste*, qui lui donne son style particulier et son ambivalence, source de tant de débats, réside dans le fait qu'Euripide se sert du retour miraculeux (*thauma*) et divin d'Alceste de chez les morts, pour dire la mort inévitable et la nécessité (*anankè*) à laquelle nul mortel ne peut échapper et que pas même les dieux, eux-mêmes immortels, ne peuvent transgresser.

Les mythes de référence rappellent le caractère incontournable de la mort, lié à la nature même de l'homme et de sa condition, tandis que le déroulement de l'action nous la montre expérimentée et vécue sous nos yeux, dans toutes ses implications humaines et ses conséquences sur ceux qu'elle frappe dans leur chair ou dans la personne de ceux auxquels les victimes sont liées: la mort non plus comme loi, mais comme expérience.

Le contexte mythique donne à l'aventure particulière vécue par Alceste et Admète sa profondeur. Ce qui se joue dans la demeure d'Admète et à travers les différents personnages de la tragédie, ce qui donne sa cohérence à l'ensemble, c'est un drame bien plus vaste: celui du rapport des hommes et des dieux à la mort. Et c'est à donner à l'aventure du couple Alceste/Admète un cadre qui situe le sens symbolique de l'aventure thessalienne que contribuent les mythes convoqués par Euripide.

L'ouverture de la tragédie sonne comme un écho assourdi des grandes querelles cosmiques mises en scène par Eschyle. Apollon y rappelle en quelques vers son affrontement avec Zeus. Parce que Zeus a foudroyé son fils, Asclepios, Apollon à son tour tue les Cyclopes, fidèles alliés de Zeus et fournisseurs de la foudre. C'est l'origine de sa servitude chez Admète, et de ses bienfaits pour le roi thessalien dont il veut récompenser l'hospitalité. La scène qui suit ce prologue donne à voir un second affrontement, verbal celui-là, entre Apollon et Thanatos. Thanatos, divinité de la mort, reproche à Apollon: 'Contre toute justice, tu veux confisquer, tu veux abolir le privilège (*timas*) des dieux infernaux (30-31)'. On peut entendre dans ce reproche comme une citation de la querelle eschyléenne entre Apollon et les Erinyes dans *Les Euménides*, lorsque ces dernières avertissaient le dieu protecteur du meurtrier Oreste: 'Ne prétends pas d'un mot abolir mes honneurs (*timas* 227);' et plus encore, le dialogue entre Apollon et le Coryphée, dans la même tragédie où est explicitement évoqué l'épisode d'Admète:

5 Cf. Méridier 1976, Conacher 1993:30-35.

'C'est ainsi que tu en agis déjà dans le palais de Phérès: tu persuadas les Mères de rendre immortels des humains (*aphthitous theinai brotous*).⁶

Et, à Apollon qui répondait:

'N'est-il pas juste d'obliger qui vous honore (*ton sebonta*), surtout à l'heure où il en a besoin?'

les Erinyes reprochaient:

'C'est toi qui déchiras l'ancien partage et usa du vin pour tromper d'antiques déesses' (721-28).

Ainsi, à l'horizon de la tragédie, se dresse le dieu qui a osé provoquer Zeus et les déesses qui filent le destin des hommes, celui aussi dont le fils a payé de sa vie d'avoir ressuscité des morts. Mais ces antiques querelles s'arrêtent aux portes de la tragédie, aux portes de la maison d'Admète, qu'Apollon quitte au moment où Thanatos y arrive, afin de ne pas être souillé par la mort, car c'est de la mort qu'il va être question tout au long de la tragédie, et de ses effets destructeurs sur ceux qu'elle touche et sur les liens qu'ils entretiennent entre eux. Cependant une différence capitale apparaît dès le début entre la forme du mythe à laquelle se réfère Eschyle et celle qui est adoptée par Euripide. Les Erinyes, chez Eschyle, accusaient Apollon d'avoir voulu donner à Admète l'immortalité. Dans la tragédie d'Euripide, il n'est jamais question d'immortalité mais d'éloigner la mort imminente, d'offrir au fils de Phérès un complément de vie. Et quand Apollon demande à Thanatos d'épargner Alceste, il lui demande seulement de la laisser vieillir auprès de son époux. Pourtant l'idée d'immortalité est là, comme un mirage, une tentation introduite par le don du dieu: la possibilité de ne pas mourir tout de suite, fonctionne comme un élément perturbateur déclenchant une série de réactions en chaîne, qui vient dérégler le cours des choses et la succession normale de la vie et de la mort. Ce qui nous sera donné à voir c'est comment la mort d'Alceste menace de destruction la maison, l'*oikos* d'Admète, en tant qu'institution, ainsi que les liens familiaux et de sociabilité qui constituaient sa vie.⁷

C'est donc bien de la transgression suprême qu'il est question ici, celle qui touche au privilège qui sépare les dieux et les hommes, et qui définit la condition même des hommes. Mais aussi du pouvoir des dieux et de ses limites quand il s'agit du destin des humains. S'ils peuvent leur donner la mort, les mythes répètent à l'envi leur impuissance à changer le terme de leur vie, à écarter d'eux la mort, qui fait le partage entre dieux et hommes. Dans l'*Illiade*, c'est Apollon lui-même qui affirme: 'Ce seront toujours deux races distinctes que celle des dieux immortels et

6 *Aphthitos*: 'qui ne connaît pas de terme,' 'incorruptible.' Dans l'*Hymne homérique à Déméter* (326), le mot s'applique aux Immortels: *athanatoi aphthittoi*: 'les Immortels que rien n'atteint.'

7 C'est la lecture anthropologique que propose Bouvrie 1990:201 en lisant dans *Alceste* 'the disruption of the basic institution of the *oikos*, and its restoration.' Cf. aussi l'analyse de Schein 1988 sur la notion de *philia* dans la tragédie d'*Alceste*.

celle des humains qui marchent sur la terre' (*Il.* 8.440-42). Même pour leur fils, les dieux ne peuvent rien: 'Même les dieux ont vu pâlir leurs fils dans les ténèbres de la mort,' rappelle le chœur d'*Alceste* aux vers 998-99. Ce qui est vrai d'Apollon impuissant à sauver Asclépios est vrai aussi de Thétis échouant à donner l'immortalité à ses fils et à protéger Achille. C'est vrai de Zeus lui-même: l'épopée le montre tenté d'intervenir pour suspendre le destin de Sarpédon, son fils (*Il.* 16.434 ss.). Mais Héra le convainc de l'abandonner à la mort depuis longtemps fixée pour lui. Thanatos et Hypnos pourront alors transporter son corps hors du champ de bataille pour le soustraire aux outrages des Achéens. Quand les dieux veulent forcer le destin et arracher pour leur protégé l'immortalité, leur don est un cadeau empoisonné: Eos finira par changer en cigale le malheureux Tithonos, pour qui elle a obtenu l'immortalité, mais oublié de demander la jeunesse (*Apollod. Bibl.* 3.12.3). A l'inverse, si Endymion conserve la jeunesse, c'est au prix d'un sommeil éternel, frère de la mort (*Apollod. Bibl.* 1.7.5).

Asclépios, lui, a réussi à ressusciter des morts, comme le rappelle le chœur à la fin de la *parodos*: mais c'est précisément parce que son pouvoir menaçait l'ordre des choses et les lois du destin, qu'il touchait par là au privilège des Immortels, que 'le dard de feu, le trait de Zeus vint le frapper' (129-30). Il n'est pas indifférent que ce soit juste avant le retour sur scène d'Héraclès avec la femme voilée qui va se révéler être Alceste, que le chœur, dans le quatrième *stasimon*, sa dernière intervention, consacre trois strophes à dire le pouvoir de Nécessité (*anankè*):

'Nécessité l'emporte sur tout, rien ne prévaut contre elle, ni les tablettes thraces où s'inscrit la parole d'Orphée, ni les remèdes que Phoibos donna aux Asclépiades pour guérir les pauvres humains Ce que Zeus décide d'un signe de son front, c'est avec toi qu'il l'accomplit'

Ni charmes ni remèdes ne peuvent empêcher les humains de mourir, encore moins peuvent-ils les ramener de la mort. Si ces paroles donnent plus d'éclat au 'miracle' (*thauma*) accompli par Héraclès, elles soulignent aussi son caractère unique, la loi d'airain qui pèse sur les humains, et que le mythe d'Alceste, à sa manière, confirme.

L'autre faisceau de mythes à l'œuvre dans la tragédie est constitué par 'les histoires' d'Héraclès. L'arrivée d'Héraclès et son départ à la fin de la tragédie sont conformes au personnage mythique du héros toujours de passage sur le chemin d'une de ses épreuves. Il l'annonce dès son arrivée au début du troisième épisode: Héraclès est sur la route de Thrace où il doit affronter Diomède et enlever ses chevaux qui se nourrissent de chair humaine, pour les conduire à Tirynthe auprès d'Eurysthée (476 et s.). C'est vers cette tâche qu'il repart à la fin de la tragédie, lorsque, Alceste ramenée auprès de son époux, il reprend sa route, malgré l'invitation d'Admète à s'attarder à son foyer. Si l'hospitalité d'Apollon était liée à une circonstance précise: l'exil du dieu sur la terre pour expier le meurtre des Cyclopes, la

présence d'Héraclès au palais d'Admète renvoie à une dimension constitutive de sa personnalité légendaire et cultuelle. Les *xeniai* d'Héraclès se trouvent liées à sa figure de héros qui toujours passe et jamais ne s'arrête,⁸ mais aussi à une des dimensions cultuelles du dieu en Attique notamment,⁹ associé à deux institutions particulières que sont les parasites d'une part, les théoxénies d'autre part, ces 'repas des dieux' à l'occasion desquels ils sont invités à manger à des tables humaines. A cette tradition se rattachent un certain nombre de cultes ou de traditions de *genè*, de grandes familles athéniennes, comme le *xenismos* la 'réception d'hospitalité' d'Héraclès, évoquée par Platon dans le dialogue *Lysis*, et titre de gloire de la famille de ce beau garçon aimé par Hippothalès.¹⁰ Héraclès est aussi un des dieux dont les sanctuaires connaissent des 'parasites,' c'est à dire des 'commensaux' du dieu, des convives d'élite, choisis par la communauté civique et chargés à ce titre de partager sa table. Cette institution archaïque sur laquelle nous ne possédons que des informations fragmentaires, est attestée notamment dans les deux cultes attiques de Diomeia et de Marathon.¹¹

L'Héraclès qui apparaît sur la scène au moment où Alceste, morte, vient de la quitter, associe ainsi deux figures familières aux spectateurs athéniens. D'une part l'Héraclès de la comédie ancienne, bruyant et gros mangeur, grand buveur aussi, qui fait écho à l'abondante imagerie du festin attestée par la céramique attique.¹² C'est le bon vivant du couplet sur l'insouciance et le bonheur à saisir:

'Tiens-toi en joie, bois, compte comme étant à toi la vie de chaque jour et le reste au destin' (787-88).

Mais dès cette tirade, dont les commentateurs font un des arguments de l'interprétation de l'*Alceste* comme drame satyrique, l'envers de cette façade insouciance apparaît.¹³ S'il faut jouir du jour présent, c'est que: 'Mortels (*thnêtous ontas*), nous devons penser en mortels (*thneta kai phronein chreôn*, 799).' 'Tous les humains, sans exception doivent mourir, et il n'en est aucun qui sache si demain il vivra encore' (782-85). Cette réflexion apparemment banale est au cœur de la tragédie et est reprise tout au long sous de multiples formes. C'est le thème notamment du discours de Phérès, le père d'Admète, qui justifie par là son amour de la vie et son

8 Loraux 1996:7s. 'Et toujours Héraclès passe.'

9 Verbanck-Piérard 1992:92-101.

10 Verbanck-Piérard 1995:112-113, sur le patronnage héracléen du *genos* des *Mesogeioi* et sur celui des *Salaminioi*. Cf. en dernier lieu Georgoudi 1998:301-317 (305) 'Héraclès dans les pratiques sacrificielles des cités.' Aussi Bruit 1989.

11 Woodford 1971.

12 'coarse glutton and drunkard,' écrit Dale 1954 (introd. xviii et xx). Verbanck-Piérard 1992, *loc. cit.*

13 *Alceste* drame satyrique: Conacher 1967:333 sq., ou 'hybrid of both tragedy and satyr play.' Sutton 1980:181s.

refus de mourir à la place de son fils (675-705). Si bien que cette brève note de comédie qui oppose Héraclès au serviteur prêt à lui reprocher sa gaieté et son appétit, pourrait avoir pour fonction de faire ressortir plus fortement le tournant des vers 820 et suivants et le changement de ton qui l'accompagne à partir du moment où Héraclès sait la vérité: la mort d'Alceste, la maîtresse de maison, la femme de son hôte.

Dès lors, c'est à une autre figure, familière elle aussi, que renvoie l'attitude d'Héraclès et son discours et à d'autres rencontres d'hospitalité (*xeniai*), moins sereines que celles que nous avons évoquées, et débouchant au contraire sur la violence, qu'Héraclès en soit l'initiateur ou l'occasion. Euripide avait écrit un drame satyrique, perdu pour nous, où il racontait l'histoire de l'étape d'Héraclès chez le roi d'Égypte Busiris.¹⁴ Sur les conseils d'un devin, ce roi sacrifiait les étrangers de passage pour mettre fin à une sécheresse qui désolait le pays. Nous ignorons sous quelle forme Euripide traitait l'épisode, mais une série de vases à figures noires ou rouges, naguère analysés par J.L. Durand et Fr. Lissarrague,¹⁵ décrivent la scène à l'autel où Héraclès, renverse la table de découpe, et disperse et tue les Égyptiens qui s'apprêtaient à le sacrifier. Un autre récit, lui aussi traité par la céramique du v^e s., racontait comment Héraclès, hôte du centaure Pholos, et bien traité par lui, lui apportait malgré tout, involontairement la mort, au cours d'une bataille contre les Centaures attirés par l'odeur du vin et rendus agressifs.¹⁶ Autant de formes de subversion de la *xenia* qui révèlent la violence d'Héraclès, en réponse à une violence extérieure. Chez Admète aussi la *xenia* d'Héraclès s'écarte du schéma attendu: Héraclès est bien reçu, mais il dîne et boit seul, au lieu de partager la table de son hôte, ce qui est une négation du banquet (*sumposion*) et de la sociabilité qu'il organise entre les hommes. Si cette solitude s'explique dans la tragédie par le deuil qui frappe Admète et lui interdit de partager la table de son hôte, elle renvoie aussi à un trait propre d'Héraclès, volontiers repris par l'iconographie traditionnelle et qui est l'isolement du banqueteur divin, couché sur son lit de festin et entouré de viandes et de nourritures riches et variées, symbole de l'abondance qu'il promet.¹⁷ Cependant, dans la tragédie, cette réjouissance même est brutalement interrompue quand Héraclès arrache de sa tête les couronnes du festin en apprenant la mort d'Alceste. La violence d'Héraclès, cette fois, ne se tournera ni contre son hôte, ni contre des intrus, mais contre Thanatos en personne, pour lui arracher Alceste.

Dans cette optique, le combat d'Héraclès contre Thanatos renvoie à celles de ses épreuves qui l'ont conduit dans l'Hadès, pour capturer Cerbère, ou sur les

14 Apollod., *Bibl.* 2.5.11.

15 1982:153-167.

16 Noel 1983:141-150. Cf. Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.4.

17 Verbanck-Piérard 1992, *loc.cit.*

routes de l'Occident, 'aux portes du soir' où le mènent ses deux derniers travaux, à la recherche des bœufs de Géryon puis du jardin des Hespérides.¹⁸ Le thème d'Héraclès vainqueur de la mort est important très tôt dans sa légende: c'est un de ceux que retiennent aussi bien l'*Iliade* que l'*Odyssée*. Dans l'*Iliade*, c'est le seul des Travaux auquel il soit fait une référence détaillée par la bouche d'Athéna qui, dans un passage où elle se plaint amèrement de l'ingratitude de son père, rappelle le secours qu'elle a toujours apporté au héros (*Il.* 5.638-643 et 14.249-62):

'... aux jours où Eurysthée l'expédiait chez Hadès aux portes bien closes, pour lui ramener de l'Erèbe le chien du cruel Hadès.'

C'est encore la capture du chien des Enfers dont il est question dans l'*Odyssée*, lorsqu'Ulysse croise l'ombre d'Héraclès parmi les morts, évoquant 'les misères sans bornes' imposées par Eurysthée 'le pire des humains' (11.602-604). Cependant, même lorsqu'Héraclès pénètre dans l'Hadès, ce n'est pas pour en ramener des morts. Qu'il capture Cerbère ou qu'il obtienne de Perséphone et d'Hadès de délivrer Thésée qui était descendu vivant aux Enfers, ses exploits ne constituent pas une transgression comparable à celle qu'accomplit Asclépios. Son rapport à la mort est d'un autre ordre, et c'est par l'exercice de cette violence qui le caractérise qu'il arrache Alceste à Thanatos. Il est significatif, dans ce contexte, que la figure de la mort qui apparaît brièvement sur le théâtre et qui est évoquée dans le bref récit d'Héraclès à la fin de la tragédie, soit une figure masculine, comme les monstres combattus par le héros, et revête une allure à la fois populaire et terrifiante.

Il est significatif aussi que l'intervention d'Héraclès, qui ferme heureusement le drame, comme celle d'Apollon l'avait ouvert, achève, par le triomphe de la force d'un héros mortel, ce que la ruse du dieu avait commencé, et lève l'ambivalence du premier don qui, en suspendant la mort d'Admète provoquait celle d'Alceste. La part mortelle d'Héraclès, rappelée plusieurs fois au cours de la tragédie, le rapproche de ceux dont il est le bienfaiteur, et leurs épreuves, comme sa victoire, anticipent d'une certaine manière son propre destin. Euripide évoquera dans deux tragédies bien plus tardives et plus sombres les épreuves du héros et son apo théose, mais elles étaient bien connues du public athénien de 438, notamment par les *Trachiniennes* de Sophocle qui racontent les souffrances et la mort d'Héraclès (si on accepte l'hypothèse qui situe cette tragédie vers 445-44). Mais Sophocle s'inspirait lui-même de poèmes antérieurs et la tradition en remontait, là encore, à l'*Iliade*:

'Le puissant Héraclès, lui-même n'a pas échappé à la mort; il était cher cependant entre tous, à sire Zeus, fils de Cronos, mais le destin l'a vaincu, et le courroux cruel d'Héré (*Il.* 18.117-19).'

Cependant l'*Odyssée* ajoute qu'Héraclès lui-même séjourne en fait

18 Jourdain-Annequin 1989.

‘parmi les Immortels, dans la joie des festins; du grand Zeus et d’Héra aux sandales dorées, il a la fille, Hébé aux chevilles bien prises.’

Ce mariage signe la réconciliation avec Héra et la reconnaissance d’Héraclès comme dieu, après ses épreuves finales. Dans *La folie d’Héraclès*, d’Euripide, on voit Héraclès revenir des Enfers avec la bête infernale. Mais c’est dans *Les Héraclides* que le chœur rappelle le bûcher qui met fin, sur le mont Oeta aux souffrances d’Héraclès ainsi qu’à sa vie d’homme, pour en faire un dieu:

‘Ton fils, Alcène, est entré dans le ciel. Son sort dépasse toute parole. Il n’est pas descendu aux demeures d’Hadès, par la flamme terrible du bûcher. Hébé l’accueillit dans son lit désirable de la maison dorée des dieux. O Hyménée, tu as réuni pour leur gloire ces deux enfants de Zeus’ (910-17).¹⁹

Même si l’Héraclès de l’*Alceste* est un jeune héros au début de ses épreuves, comme l’indiquent les exploits auxquels il fait allusion—son affrontement physique avec Thanatos, son engagement à

‘descendre (s’il le faut) vers ceux d’en bas, Perséphone et Hadès, vers les demeures sans soleil pour leur redemander Alceste (850-53),’

mettent son exploit en résonance avec les autres rencontres d’Héraclès et de la mort.

Le personnage d’Héraclès joue un rôle central dans cette tragédie d’Euripide d’une autre façon encore. Il est à la croisée du thème de l’hospitalité et de la rencontre avec la mort. C’est lui qui fait le lien entre les deux, et pas seulement à cause du rôle qu’il joue dans la dramaturgie de la pièce. S’il peut occuper cette place, c’est que sa figure propre de héros mortel, héros à sa manière, de l’hospitalité, et bien placé, par ses errances perpétuelles, pour tester les qualités de ses hôtes, mais aussi destiné à devenir dieu après avoir subi l’épreuve de la mort, en fait un témoin privilégié de la condition mortelle de l’homme, à laquelle il doit, lui, finalement échapper, après l’avoir expérimentée jusqu’à son terme. Victorieux de la mort, il l’est au terme des combats où il l’emporte sur elle en lui arrachant ses victimes (Thésée, Alceste), mais aussi par sa conquête finale de l’immortalité. Sa victoire sur Thanatos au terme de la tragédie est en même temps, et paradoxalement, une victoire de l’homme sur sa condition, dans la mesure où Admète a compris au terme de cette épreuve que la vie n’a pas de sens hors d’un bonheur partagé, et de l’acceptation de sa condition mortelle.

En effet, dans cette tragédie, c’est finalement, de la condition mortelle de l’humanité qu’il est question, dans le contexte particulier d’une maison qui, donnée pour le palais d’un prince thessalien ami des dieux, ressemble fort par ailleurs à l’*oikos* d’un Athénien du v^e siècle. Alceste est la première concernée et la seule à avoir choisi son destin. C’est son expérience de la mort qui nous est donnée à voir,

19 Sur l’apothéose d’Héraclès cf. Diod.Sic. 4.38.3-39.4. Sur les représentations du bûcher de l’Oeta et l’apothéose d’Héraclès cf. Laurens et Lissarrague 1989 et Georgoudi 1998.

d'abord telle qu'elle est décrite par la servante, puis par Alceste elle-même, à la première personne, au début du deuxième épisode—'La nuit ténébreuse rampe sur mes yeux (278-282)'— et vécue en direct par les spectateurs, avec un luxe de détails réalistes concernant les réactions des uns et des autres, et une précision rituelle qui permettent de considérer cette tragédie comme un document anthropologique exceptionnel.²⁰ Alceste se prépare à la mort et anticipe sa propre absence en tentant d'en aménager les conséquences pour Admète et pour ses enfants, d'où les promesses qu'elle lui arrache, et d'abord celle de lui être fidèle. Si Alceste disparaît dès le vers 434 pour ne plus reparaitre que dans l'*exodos*, dans un rôle muet, pour une scène où tout se joue entre Héraclès et Admète, ce n'en est pas moins sa mort, longuement exposée aux yeux des spectateurs, qui occupe la longue première scène.

Mais la tragédie est aussi l'épreuve des survivants, épreuve qu'Admète vit à son tour, au milieu de ses enfants et de ses serviteurs, (413 et s.):

'Admète, il faut supporter ce malheur. Tu n'es ni le premier ni le dernier qui ait perdu une épouse excellente. Et souviens-toi aussi que tous il nous faudra mourir.'

C'est cet aspect-là de la mort qu'Admète va expérimenter tout au long et que soulignent les vers 939-40:

'Et moi dont le destin était de ne pas vivre, j'ai esquivé le coup fatal/ Pour traîner une vie pénible: voilà ce qu'enfin je comprends (*arti manthanô*: je viens de le comprendre).'

Au retour des funérailles de sa femme, après la scène au cours de laquelle il a rompu symboliquement les liens qui l'unissaient à ses parents ('Si je pouvais publiquement—*kêrukôn hupo*, par la voix des hérauts—répudier ton foyer paternel, je le répudierais,' 738-40), Admète mesure le vide de sa vie à venir et la rupture de tous les liens qui le rattachaient aux autres. C'est ainsi que je propose d'interpréter cet affrontement entre le père et le fils qui a fait couler tant d'encre. Plutôt que de s'arrêter à l'évaluation psychologique de l'égoïsme de l'un et de l'autre, on pourrait voir à l'œuvre dans ce dialogue cruel, la destruction du tissu familial et social introduite par la possibilité soudain donnée par le dieu d'avancer ou de reculer le moment de mourir. Ce serait en quelque sorte la rançon de la transgression d'une loi implacable. Si l'on peut reculer ou choisir le moment de mourir, si la Nécéssité ne fait plus loi, alors l'ordre des générations est brouillé et tout peut survenir: un père peut refuser de mourir en place de son fils et un fils reprocher à son père son amour de la vie. Alceste est admirable, et Platon fera de son dévouement la preuve du pouvoir de l'amour, mais Euripide n'a pas choisi de mettre l'accent sur cet aspect, mais sur les effets de son choix. La longue plainte des vers 860 à 960 exprime

20 'A veritable anthropology of death,' écrit Charles Segal 1993:51.

la prise de conscience d'Admète devant sa maison vide, dont Alceste était le cœur vivant. C'est bien l'être social tout entier d'Admète qui est menacé par cette disparition, le fils, l'époux (et c'est le sens de l'évocation de la fête de ses nocces), le père ('quand les enfants à mes genoux viendront tomber en réclamant leur mère'), la fréquentation de ses concitoyens ('exclu des nocces des Thessaliens ...'). Je ne parlerais pas de l'inconscience d'Admète ou de son égoïsme à propos des vers souvent cités contre lui:

'J'envie les trépassés! mon cœur s'en va vers eux, là-bas sont les demeures que je voudrais habiter ...'

Ce ne sont pas le caractère ou la psychologie d'Admète qui sont ici l'essentiel, me semble-t-il. Mais on peut y voir plutôt une marque de l'ironie euripidéenne: Admète et avec lui tous les siens, sont des otages, ils sont les instruments d'une expérimentation construite sur une situation inouïe que suggérait le mythe et qu'Admète n'a pas choisie ('On doit accepter ce que les dieux envoient,' rappelle un peu plus loin le chœur).²¹ Que devient l'homme quand la possibilité lui est donnée de modifier son destin mortel? Qu'est-ce qui donne sens et valeur à sa vie? La vie est-elle en elle-même un bien? A quelles conditions le devient-elle? on connaît la forme héroïque et épique des réponses données à ces questions. Ici, c'est l'individu dans sa dimension privée, à la fois familiale et sociale qui est confronté à elles.

Si la tragédie porte le nom d'Alceste, il n'en est pas moins vrai que le personnage central en est Admète, non seulement par la durée de sa présence en scène, mais parce que ce qui se joue, la mort et le retour d'Alceste, sont déterminés par cela même qui définit Admète et son rapport aux hommes et aux dieux: sa philoxénie, son sens de l'hospitalité. Admète *philoxenos* (858), parce que son personnage se confond avec cette qualité dont il est comme l'incarnation, et, peut-être, le prisonnier. *Agan philoxenos*: 'trop hospitalier' (809), dit le serviteur qui révèle à Héraclès la ruse de son maître pour le garder dans sa maison malgré la mort de sa femme, mais toute la tragédie confirme qu'aux yeux d'Apollon comme d'Héraclès, cette qualité-là est ce qui vaut à Admète leur faveur.

La seule chose qui lui reste, au terme de son épreuve, c'est cette qualité qui l'isole des autres dans son excès, mais qui le rapproche des dieux, et qui se confond avec sa piété: sa pratique de l'hospitalité, qui dans la tragédie s'exerce chaque fois vis-à-vis d'un dieu, même si dans la tragédie Héraclès se présente comme mortel et loin de la fin de ses épreuves. C'est cette qualité qui apportera à Admète la fin du cauchemar avec le retour d'Alceste ramenée des Enfers.

La tragédie s'ouvre sur l'éloge par Apollon de l'hospitalité d'Admète. C'est elle qui lui vaut, de la part du dieu, le qualificatif de *hosios*, qui le place au même rang que le dieu: 'Car, c'est un juste que, juste moi-même, j'ai trouvé dans le fils de

21 Cf. Smith 1960.

Phérès,' traduit Méridier ('For, lover of virtue that I am, I met a truly virtuous man,' Conacher 1988). Cette qualité qui le hausse au même rang qu'un dieu signifie plus que juste ou vertueux, qui ne traduisent pas l'implication religieuse contenue dans le mot. Pieux conviendrait à l'homme mais est étrange appliqué à un dieu par lui-même. De fait, on trouve *hosios* appliqué par Euripide aussi bien à un homme qu'à un dieu. Dans le *Cyclope*, *hosioi* est employé précisément à propos de l'hospitalité, et associé à *philoxenoi*: Ulysse questionne Silène sur les Cyclopes: 'Sont-ils bons pour les étrangers (*philoxenoi*) et pieux envers les hôtes (*hosioi per xenous*)?' (125). Dans les *Héraclides*, Alcmène applique le mot à Zeus (au moment où Iolaos s'apprête à engager le combat contre Eurysthée, c'est à dire à mettre en jeu sa vie et celle des siens):

'Zeus, je ne dirai pas un mot contre lui, c'est à lui de savoir s'il se conduit loyalement (*ei d'esti hosios*: s'il se conduit selon l'ordre des choses) à mon égard (719):'

Pour J. Rudhardt (1958) *hosios* 'signifie, dans son sens originel et profond, conforme à l'ordre religieux selon lequel la puissance s'exerce normalement en assurant dans les rapports qui les définissent, l'existence des êtres et des choses ...' A cet ordre religieux les dieux sont soumis aussi bien que les hommes. L'*hosiotés* d'Admète est ce qui le rend digne d'accueillir un dieu exilé sur la terre, parce qu'il se conduit selon l'ordre religieux des choses, c'est aussi ce comportement qui fait de lui un homme *hosios*.

A cet hommage à Admète qui ouvre la tragédie correspond l'éloge et l'encouragement d'Héraclès qui la ferment: 'Continue, Admète, à montrer à tes hôtes la piété d'un juste: *kai, dikaios on, to loipon, Admêt', eusebei peri xenous*' (1147).

Toute la tragédie est contenue entre ces deux formules. Le drame et la mort d'Alceste sont enchâssés entre deux *xeniai*. Comme nous l'avons vu, c'est pour remercier Admète de son hospitalité qu'Apollon trompe les Moires et obtient d'elles qu'elles renoncent à le faire mourir sur le champ (*parautika*), s'il trouve quelqu'un qui prenne sa place. La mort d'Alceste est donc la conséquence indirecte de la générosité d'Admète envers son hôte, par l'intermédiaire d'un de ces dons imprudents ou ambigus dont les mythes offrent tant d'exemples. Le bienfait devient une épreuve, pour celui qui le reçoit et pour son entourage, et met en même temps en valeur le dévouement d'Alceste et la pieuse hospitalité d'Admète, impossible à mettre en défaut. Il faudra en effet l'arrivée d'un nouvel hôte, lui aussi fils de Zeus, pour mettre fin à l'épreuve en délivrant Alceste de la mort. Le troisième *stasimon* (568-605) associe les deux visiteurs divins précisément au milieu de la tragédie: au moment où Admète, contre l'avis du chœur, vient d'affirmer son intention d'accueillir Héraclès, malgré son deuil. La strophe et l'antistrophe 1 rappellent le séjour d'Apollon chez Admète; la strophe 2, la prospérité que ce séjour a apporté à son domaine et à ses troupeaux. L'antistrophe 2 évoque son nouvel acte d'hospi-

talité et célèbre en lui l'homme de bien et son souci des dieux (*to eugenes, theosebê phota*, 605), qui appelle en quelque sorte le bienfait à venir. Admète est un héros de l'hospitalité, qui la fait passer avant tout autre préoccupation, témoignant par là de sa piété. Car sa piété se confond avec sa pratique de l'hospitalité. Le contre-exemple, chez Euripide même, pourrait être Polymestor, le roi thrace victime de la vengeance d'Hécube dans la tragédie du même nom, pour avoir mis à mort Polydore, le dernier fils de Priam, à lui confié au nom des liens d'hospitalité entre les deux rois. 'Impie, perfide, hôte criminel devant la justice et devant les dieux' que dénonce Hécube au vers 1234: '*out' eusebês oute piston ... xenon*.' Au vers 1004, elle s'adresse à Polymestor qu'elle interpelle par antiphrase comme '*eusebês anêr*:' '*ei gar eusebês anêr*: car tu es un homme religieux.' La vraie réponse et le vrai recours contre le destin mortel de l'homme serait dans la piété qui prend ici la forme particulière de l'hospitalité.

Dès lors, que disent sur la mort la fin de la tragédie et le retour d'Alceste? Héraclès a vaincu Thanatos et lui a arraché Alceste, portant ainsi 'atteinte aux privilèges des dieux infernaux', comme Thanatos, dans le prologue, reprochait à Apollon de tenter de le faire. Admète s'apprête à connaître le bonheur avec Alceste retrouvée, comme il l'annonce aux derniers vers. Mais si la mort a été retardée, il n'est pas dit mais suggéré qu'elle arrivera à son heure, au terme d'une vie accomplie. Euripide laisse cet avenir dans l'ombre pour mettre l'accent sur le bonheur retrouvé, mais le silence même sur l'avenir plus lointain laisse ouverte la question. Admète ni Alceste n'ont gagné l'immortalité. Ce qu'Apollon a écarté d'Admète c'est une mort prématurée: il a évité qu'il ne meure 'sur le champ' (*parautika*), de même qu'il ne demande à Thanatos que de 'différer' pour Alceste 'un coup qui viendra tôt ou tard.' Mais la fin de la tragédie ne constitue pas un retour au *statu quo ante*. Ch. Segal souligne à juste titre le silence d'Alceste dans la dernière scène, silence rituel, certes, mais aussi écho d'une expérience qu'elle a été seule à vivre jusqu'au bout, elle qui a vu Hadès l'emporter: '*... she has had all the pain of dying*' (Segal 1993:72). Admète quant à lui a surmonté une épreuve, il a connu le malheur, il a en quelque sorte payé sa part aux dieux d'en bas. La mort d'Alceste, c'était l'autre face de la tentation offerte par le dieu, d'échapper à la mort, ce rêve d'immortalité qui hante tous les hommes, et qui a ruiné son *oikos*, puis ses liens avec ses parents, soit ce tissu social qui fait la vie. Ce que lui a, au terme de la tragédie, apporté le don du dieu, c'est, mieux qu'une vie plus longue, la connaissance et l'acceptation de la condition mortelle qui est la sienne, connaissance et acceptation qui seules peuvent apporter aux hommes le bonheur. Aux derniers vers d'*Oedipe Roi* qui affirmaient: 'On ne doit estimer heureux aucun mortel avant de voir son dernier jour et qu'il ait atteint le terme de sa vie sans subir de souffrance,' répond le: 'Aujourd'hui commence une vie meilleure (*beltiô bion tou prosthen*) je ne nierai pas

que je suis heureux (*ou gar eutuchôn arnêsomai*)' du roi de Thessalie. Sa piété et l'amitié des dieux qui la récompensent lui ont permis de triompher de l'épreuve.

L'analyse des mythes convoqués ou évoqués par Euripide dans la tragédie d'*Alceste* permet de mettre en évidence une des lignes dominantes de sa thématique: celle des humains confrontés à leur condition mortelle. Au terme de cette lecture on peut constater qu'à travers l'histoire édifiante d'*Alceste* la 'bonne épouse' (et même, 'la meilleure: *aristé*') et d'Admète, l'ami des dieux et l'hôte exemplaire, la tragédie est nourrie par un faisceau de mythes que la forme dramatique transforme en donnant à leurs acteurs une vie nouvelle, en prise directe avec la réalité vécue par les spectateurs d'Euripide. Plus précisément, l'histoire mythique du couple Admète/Alceste, accueillie et transformée par Euripide, se détache sur un fond de traditions renvoyant toutes au thème des rapports des dieux et des hommes à la mort comme nécessité, transgressée, combattue, différée, mais finalement imposée, depuis l'arrière-plan cosmique évoqué par le débat entre Apollon et les Parques, ou la mort d'Asclépios, jusqu'au combat provisoirement victorieux d'Héraclès contre Thanatos. Mais ce terreau mythique nourrit la mise en scène dramatique de la réalité quotidienne et vécue de l'expérience de la mort, en tant qu'elle définit la condition des hommes, réalité transfigurée et grandie par la transposition théâtrale. Ni symbole, ni métaphore, le mythe fonctionne ici comme un mode d'expression particulier de l'expérience de l'homme dans le monde. A travers l'exemple d'*Alceste*, on peut voir comment la tragédie du v^e siècle relaie les différents modèles de transmission des mythes: récits, chants, traditions culturelles, images, sous une forme spécifique, adaptée à la fonction du théâtre tragique dans la cité athénienne.

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Retheorizing Myth¹

Bruce Lincoln

I

LET ME BEGIN by observing that although I have offered some harsh criticisms of Georges Dumézil, and have come to reject that part of his *opus* that is caught up in the discourse of 'Indo-Europeans,' there is still much in his writings I find worthwhile.² In particular, I would emphasize his rigor, his sense of system and structure, his respect for the rationality of the materials he studied, and his explication of a complex classificatory logic encoded in mythic narratives. In all these regards his work closely resembles that of Lévi-Strauss, which I take to be the best theoretical discussion of myth to date, notwithstanding its own familiar limitations.³ Taking cognizance of these similarities, there were those who sought to treat Dumézil as a harbinger of structuralism, a somewhat tendentious oversimplification to which Dumézil took sharp exception.⁴ Still, the similarities are real enough and their explanation probably lies less in any direct influence of one man on the other than in the Parisian milieu they shared and the influences to which they were both exposed as students. In particular, I think one can point to a single, extraor-

1 Excerpted from Bruce Lincoln 1999a.

2 I have discussed Dumézil's work on several occasions, including Lincoln 1991: 231-68, Lincoln 1998, and Lincoln 1999b, all with citation of the previous literature.

3 As I see it, Lévi-Strauss's existentialist, marxist, and post-structuralist critics all charged him with the same failings, although each voiced this in their own particular idioms. Thus, all took exception to his disengaged formalism and primarily synchronic orientation, both of which drain mythic narratives of their historic context and political agency. See, *inter alia*, Goldmann 1966, Abel 1966, Godelier 1971, Diamond 1971, Lefebvre 1971, Jameson 1972, Bourdieu 1977, and Scholte 1979.

4 The most famous attempt along these lines was made by two of Lévi-Strauss's students, Smith and Sperber 1971, which provoked a stinging rebuque, Dumézil 1973:14-15. Relations between Dumézil and Lévi-Strauss themselves, who had been colleagues at the *École pratique des hautes études* in 1948-49, never became directly antagonistic and overcame whatever strain they had experienced when Lévi-Strauss formally received Dumézil upon his entry into the *Académie Française* (1979). Their remarks on that occasion bear close reading, Dumézil and Lévi-Strauss 1979. See further, Dumézil, 1987: 118-21 and Littleton 1982: 267-75.

dinary sentence in the writings of Mauss and Durkheim, which I take to have been particularly influential on both Dumézil and Lévi-Strauss. This is found toward the end of the essay on *Primitive Classification* coauthored by the masters of the *école sociologique*, where they introduced, but failed to develop the idea that myth may be understood as taxonomy in narrative form.⁵

While I would hardly insist that this formulation accounts for all myths, let alone all aspects of myth, I find it terribly suggestive, and I suspect that pursuing its implications led to all that is best in Dumézil and Lévi-Strauss alike. What is more, I think it can lead us further still. Like all Durkheimian formulations, it is singularly unattuned to issues of politics and history. To give it a sharper critical edge, I would introduce an orientation more associated with cultural theorists from Antonio Gramsci to Roland Barthes and Pierre Bourdieu.⁶ Toward that end, I would begin by noting that taxonomy is hardly a neutral process, since the order established among all that is classified (including items treated only by allusion or implication, and above all human groupings) is hierarchic as well as categoric.⁷ When a taxonomy is encoded in mythic form, the narrative packages a specific, contingent system of discrimination in a particularly attractive and memorable form and, more importantly, it naturalizes and legitimates it. Myth, then, is not just taxonomy, but *ideology* in narrative form.

II

As an example, let me consider the way gender relations are thematized in the Old Irish epic *Táin Bó Cúalnge* ('The Cattle Raid of Cooley').⁸ The story begins when Ailill and Medb, the king and queen of Connacht, argue over which one of them is nobler and wealthier than the other. Their bantering competition takes place against the fact, well-known to the text's native audience, that Medb is the most powerful of all queens who appear in Irish literature, while Ailill is only one of the many men whom she takes sequentially as her husband. Lying in bed, they compare their lineages, which add to the complexity of the problem. Medb, it turns out, is the eldest and most excellent of six children, all daughters, born to the high king of Ireland, while Ailill is the youngest of three sons. His father bequeathed the kingdoms of Leinster and Tara to his two elder sons, leaving Ailill to acquire royal

5 Durkheim and Mauss 1963:77-78: 'Every mythology is fundamentally a classification, but one which borrows its principles from religious beliefs, not from scientific ideas.' The French original dates to 1902: *Chaque mythologie est, au fond, une classification, mais qui emprunte ses principes à des croyances religieuses, et non pas à des notions scientifiques.* Mauss 1974:79.

6 The kinds of work I have in mind are Gramsci 1992-, Barthes 1972, and Bourdieu 1991.

7 I have argued this point more fully in an essay on 'The tyranny of taxonomy,' Lincoln 1989:131-141. For an elegant demonstration of the arguments advanced in that essay, see Smith 1994.

8 Text in O'Rahilly 1967.

status by marrying Medb, who had received Connacht from her father. The story thus juxtaposes a queen whose claim to rulership is of a characteristically 'male' type (*i.e.* based on patrilineal descent, primogeniture, and personal excellence) with a king whose claim is conversely 'female' (*i.e.* mediated through marriage). This contrast having been posed, Medb and Ailill make a competitive inventory of their possessions, starting with the least valuable among them (buckets, tubs, pots, and washpails) and building gradually to the most (jewels, gold, and livestock). Item by item, the fortunes of husband and wife match one another precisely until, in the very last instance, Ailill gains a telling advantage that salvages and reasserts male privilege: 'But there was a matchless bull among Ailill's cattle. As a calf it abided among Medb's cattle, and its name was Findbennach. But it would not have been an honor for him to have been the property of a woman, so it left and was now among the cattle of the king.'⁹

Dismayed, but not yet defeated, Medb thus set out to capture a bull equal or superior to her husband's. This is the magnificent Donn Cúalnge ('the Dark Bull of Cooley'), and the epic follows her attempt. Countless battles and deeds of heroism fill the *Táin* as Medb's forces try to wrest this beast from the men of Ulster, led by their champion, Cú Chulainn. Finally, warriors by the thousands confront one another in a see-saw battle of unspeakable ferocity, and tension runs high as Medb, having seized the great bull, attempts to make off with it as the furious Cú Chulainn bears down upon her. At this critical moment in the action, the text reports: 'It is then that a foul flow of blood came over Medb.'¹⁰ Her menstrual period forces her to withdraw from battle, submit to Cú Chulainn (who declines to kill her, not being a 'slayer of women'), and lose the bull. Fergus, Medb's lover and leader of her troops, then pronounces judgment on the disaster: 'Fitting were the events of this day for those who followed a woman.'¹¹

The episode of Medb's menses thus resolves the quarrel with which the story began, establishing—once and for all—that Queen Medb is not the equal of King Ailill, and the female is not the equal of the male. Where Freud backed his pronouncement 'biology is destiny' with a discourse that claimed the authority of science, the *Táin* makes the same point in narrative fashion. Its story is organized with fiendish care such that Medb's claims to parity are first made plausible, then thoroughly undone by the gendered nature of her body. End discussion and Q.E.D.

9 *Táin Bó Cúalnge* 71-74: *Acht boí tarb sainemail ar búaiþ Ailella ocus ba lóeg bó do Meidb atacom-naic ocus Findbennach ainm. Acht nírbó miad leis beith for bantinchur, acht dochuaid co mboi for búaiþ in ríg.*

10 *Ibid.* 4824-25: *Is and drecgais a fiúal fola for Meidb.*

11 *Ibid.* 4847: *Rapa chomadas in lá sa indiu ám i ndiad mná.*

To accomplish its ends, the *Táin* does not just differentiate the categories of male and female, or the others with which these are brought into association (Ulster and Connacht, Donn Cúalnge and Finnbenach Ai, *etc.*). It also ranks these, and misrepresents the ranking it offers as the product of nature and necessity, rather than a contingent set of human preferences advanced by interested actors, some of whom are responsible for the text. This misrepresentation of culture as nature is an ideological move characteristic of myth, as is the projection of the narrator's ideals, desires, and favored ranking of categories into a fictive prehistory that purportedly establishes how things are and must be. Other ideological moves frequent in myth include the misrepresentation of a part of some group for the whole, the homologization of unrelated categories (men outrank women, just as Ulster outranks Connacht and the Donn Cúalnge outranks Finnbenach Ai), and the fictive reconciliation of oppositions and conflicts that are frankly unresolvable in lived experience.¹²

III

Although it seems reasonable to assume that those responsible for this version of the *Táin* were males connected to the province of Ulster, no surviving text announces its author by name. In this, the *Táin* is like most mythic texts. Indeed, myth is often treated as an anonymous and collective product, in which questions of authorship are irrelevant. Lévi-Strauss has done this in a most sophisticated and challenging fashion, treating myth as a logical structure that essentially writes itself, variants being the product of an impersonal process whereby that structure explores its own variables until reaching exhaustion of the available possibilities. Such a view alleviates the frustration of those who seek authors for mythical texts, but the price for this is unacceptably high, since it drains all agency from the act of narration. But if we are to treat myth as an ideological, and not simply a taxonomic discourse, we will need a more dialectic, dynamic, and eminently political theory of narration: one that recognizes the capacity of narrators to modify details of the stories that pass through them, introducing changes in the classificatory order as they do so, most often in ways that reflect their subject position and advance their interests.

12 This last operation—the fictive reconciliation of tensions and contradictions unresolvable in practice—may be observed in the *Táin's* last scene, where the two bulls duel until the Donn Cúalnge kills the Finnbenach Ai. Here, once again hierarchy is firmly established, for the white bull is not the equal of the dark. Directly that is done, however the victorious bull dies, utterly confounding the categories of equity and hierarchy. Not only are the two unequal bulls now equal in death, but the originally unequal fortunes of Medb and Ailill have become equal in quite unexpected fashion: while Medb has not gained the bull she desired, Ailill has lost the champion that initially gave him his one-bull advantage.

Myths are not snapshot representations of stable taxonomies and hierarchies: perfectly reflective, thoroughly derivative, and absolutely immutable. The relation between social order and the stories told about it is much looser and—as a result—considerably more dynamic, for this loose fit creates possibilities for rival narrators, who modify aspects of the established order as depicted in prior variants, with consequences that can be farreaching if and when audiences come to perceive their innovative representations as reality.¹³ Skilled narrators can do this subtly or bluntly, in play or dead earnest, and everything in between. In so doing, they use instruments that most often assist in the reproduction of the socio-taxonomic order to recalibrate that order by introducing new categories, eliminating old ones, or revising both categories and the hierarchic orders in which they are organized.

Narrators are not the sole agents in such projects of recalibration: one must also take account of reception. Audiences (and fractions of same) can resist narrative and classificatory innovations; moreover, they are perfectly capable of introducing innovations of their own by selective hearing and reinterpretation. Anticipation of hostile audience responses can also work as a preemptive brake on narrators' willingness to introduce modifications. Ultimately, what come to be accepted as standard, proper, or hegemonic versions of myths are collective products that have been negotiated between narrators and audiences over time. These form the background against which future narrators craft their interventions and future audiences judge them.

Ideally, one would like to study each variant not only in its relation to all other variants, but also with attention to the social and historic situation in which each variant made its appearance and found its reception, so that one can get a sense of how interplay between narrators and audiences produced narrative innovations, taxonomic modifications, and consequent shifts in the distribution of advantages over the course of time. To put it differently, our task is not finished until we have considered texts, contexts, intertexts, pretexts, subtexts, and consequences. A very tall order, but one that can be rendered operational through a fairly straightforward protocol, designed for students of myth. Although these steps may not be appropriate for all mythic texts, given variations in the availability of evidence, *e.g.*, they are useful and revealing in enough cases that I think it worthwhile to spell them out.

13 The capacity of representations to modify social reality depends on two factors: a) the gap between signifier and signified (which permits representations to resemble their referents only imperfectly in their initial moment); b) the fact that audiences whose consciousness is shaped (in part) by their consumption of representations are also the people who constitute the social order (which permits them to reconstitute reality in attempts to make it conform with the representations to which they have given credence).

- 1) Establish the categories at issue in the mythic text on which the inquiry is focused. Note also the relations among these categories (including the ways different categorical sets and subsets are brought into alignment), as well as their ranking relative to one another and the logic used to justify that ranking.
- 2) Note whether there are any changes in the ranking of categories between the beginning of the narrative and its conclusion. Ascertain the logic used to justify any such shifts.
- 3) Assemble a set of related materials from the same culture area: other variants of the same story, other closely related stories (on the basis of characters, actions, themes, *etc.*), and other texts in which the same categories are at issue. Establish any differences that exist between the categories and rankings that appear in the focal text and those in these other materials.
- 4) Establish any connections that exist between the categories that figure in these texts and those which condition the relations of the social groups among whom the texts circulate.
- 5) Establish the date and authorship of all texts considered and the circumstances of their appearance, circulation, and reception.
- 6) Try to draw reasonable inferences about the interests that are advanced, defended, or negotiated through each act of narration. Pay particular attention to the way the categories constituting the social order are redefined and recalibrated, such that certain groups move up and others move down within the extant hierarchy.
- 7) Remember that to treat pointed issues, even in the most manipulative form, is to acknowledge them and to open up possibilities for those with other interests to advance alternate interpretations and thematizations. The enunciation of any mythic variant opens up an arena of struggle and maneuver that can be pursued by those who produce other variants of the myth and other interpretations of the variant.

IV

As an example of what one gains by treating myth in this fashion, let me consider Plato's account of the soul's ascent that is found in the *Phaedrus* (246a-249d, with some continuity through 257d).¹⁴ This text has the advantage of being reasonably familiar and of being connected to some fundamental transformations in the history of western thought, but it also makes for a clear and compelling example of the kinds of processes I take to be characteristic of the mythic genre. It is generally

14 For earlier discussions of this passage, see Bett 1986, de Romilly 1982, Nicolai 1981, Lebeck 1972, Schmalzkriedt 1966, McGibbon 1964, and Bluck 1958.

understood to have been written circa 370 BCE, before the *Timaeus* and after the *Republic*, for it pursues several issues and makes use of several constructs introduced in the latter text, including aspects of eschatology and the model of the tripartite soul.¹⁵ As we shall see, it also continues the central project of the *Republic*: the call for rule by philosopher-kings.

Within this passage, Plato offers a quasi-allegorical account of the soul as a winged chariot, whose driver represents the rational portion that struggles to control its irrational aspects. These he depicts as a team of horses, one strong and noble, but aggressive or 'spirited;' the other dangerous and unruly, driven by sexual and other appetites.¹⁶ When all is in order, the soul-chariot's wings are able to carry it into the highest heavens, but any failings of rational control damage the wings and impede the vehicle's ascent. The degree to which the chariot rises is thus an index of the soul's perfection, and the gods themselves show the way to the top of the skies, driving in a ranked martial order with Zeus in the lead.¹⁷

The zenith is not the end of their journey, however, only its crucial point of transition. After passing through the top, they pass to the outside of the celestial vault: the realm of the hyperuranian. Here, on a grassy meadow (*leimôn*, 248b), which is also referred to as the plain of truth (*alêtheias ... pedion*, 248b), they behold the ideal forms that stand at the core of Platonic philosophy. From this site—and more immediately, from this sight—the rational part of the divine souls takes nourishment as if from a pasture, while their irrational portions feed more conventionally on nectar and ambrosia.¹⁸

Humans also aspire to reach the hyperuranian, but for them the passage is much more difficult.

'Such is the life of the gods. Regarding the other souls, that which best follows its god and most resembles him lifts the charioteer's head up to the place beyond. Carried around in the circuit and confused by the horses' clamor, it hardly beholds the realities. It rises and it sinks, and being overpowered by the horses, it sees some things and others not. All the others follow, striving for what is on high, but being unable to reach it they are carried around beneath the surface, striking one another and jostling each other as each tries to achieve its goal. A great clamor arises, along with com-

15 Thus, *inter alia*, Hackforth 1952: 3-7, Brisson 1989: 33-34. Compare the description of the hyper-uranian in Pl. *Phdr.* 247c to Pl. *Resp.* vi 514a-517a, vii 517b or the analysis of the tripartite soul in Pl. *Phdr.* 246ab to that in Pl. *Resp.* iv. Dusanic 1980 attempts to situate the dialogue in the events of 366-65, but this seems a bit late and the arguments advanced are less than compelling. Preferable is the discussion of Morgan 1990.

16 Pl. *Phdr.* 246ab, with further development of the image at 253d-254e.

17 Pl. *Phdr.* 246e-247a.

18 Pl. *Phdr.* 247be.

petition and sweat. Many are lamed and many wings are broken by the bad nature of the charioteers But this is the law of Retribution (*thesmos ... Adrasteias*): any soul that follows its god and beholds any of the truths will be without sorrow through another circuit and if it is always able to do this, it will forever be unharmed. But in the event that it is unable to be drawn along [by a god] and does not see [any of the forms], then it will suffer forgetfulness and evil. It will become heavy, and having become heavy, the feathers of its wings will molt and it will fall to earth.¹⁹

This loss of wings and fall to earth results in the soul's incarnation within a human body. Different kinds of souls, however, find their ways into different human forms, dependent on how long they have remained within the hyperuranian, how much they have seen, and how much they are able to remember, all of which condition their intellectual and moral quality. The *Phaedrus* myth, as has been long recognized, fuses cosmology, eschatology, epistemology, and psychology to theorize the structure of the universe, the relation of life and death, the origins of knowledge, and the nature of souls able to know. On this last point, however, it is important to recognize the discriminatory nature of Plato's account, which begins with the observation that people possess different capacities for knowledge, then treats these as inborn, being a function of hyperuranian experiences that precede the soul's incarnation. A hierarchic ranking of souls and incarnations is possible on this basis and Plato works it out with evident pleasure.

That soul which has seen most [in the hyperuranian] will come into birth as a man who is philosophical [lit., 'wisdom-loving'] or beauty-loving (*philokalos*), or someone musical and erotic. Second, as a lawful king or warlike ruler; third, as a statesman, or some financier or businessman; fourth, as a gymnast, who delights in his toil, or someone who practices healing of the body; fifth, someone who leads a mantic life or has authority over mystery rites. In the sixth birth, it will be a poet or some other cobbler of imitations;

19 Pl. *Phdr.* 248ac: Καὶ οὗτος μὲν θεῶν βίος· αἱ δὲ ἄλλαι ψυχαί, ἡ μὲν ἄριστα θεῶ ἐπομένη καὶ εἰκασμένη ὑπερήρεν εἰς τὸν ἔξω τόπον τὴν τοῦ ἠνιόχου κεφαλὴν, καὶ συμπερινήχθη τὴν περιφορὰν, θορυβουμένη ὑπὸ τῶν ἵππων καὶ μόγις καθορώσα τὰ ὄντα· ἡ δὲ τοτὲ μὲν ἦρεν, τοτὲ δ' ἔδν. βιαζομένων δὲ τῶν ἵππων τὰ μὲν εἶδεν, τὰ δ' οὐ. αἱ δὲ δὴ ἄλλαι γλιχόμεναι μὲν ἅπασαι τοῦ ἄνω ἔπονται, ἀδυνατοῦσαι δὲ, ὑποβρύχια συμπεριφέρονται, πατοῦσαι ἀλλήλας καὶ ἐπιβάλλουσαι, ἑτέρα πρὸ τῆς ἑτέρας πειρωμένη γενέσθαι. Θόρυβος οὖν καὶ ἄμιλλα καὶ ἰδρῶς ἔσχατος γίγνεται, οὐ δὴ κακία ἠνιόχων πολλὰ μὲν χωλεύονται, πολλὰ δὲ πολλὰ πτερὰ θραύονται θεσμός τε Ἀδραστείας ὄδε. ἥτις ἂν ψυχὴ θεῶ συνοπαδὸς γενομένη κατὶδῃ τι τῶν ἀληθῶν, μέχρι τε τῆς ἑτέρας περιόδου εἶναι ἀπήμονα, κἂν αἰεὶ τοῦτο δύνηται ποιεῖν, αἰεὶ ἀβλαβὴ εἶναι· ὅταν δὲ ἀδυνατήσασα ἐπισπέσθαι μὴ ἴδῃ, καὶ τι συντυχία χρησαμένη λήθῃς τε καὶ κακίας πλησθεῖσα βαρυνθῇ, βαρυνθεῖσα δὲ πτερορρηγῆ τε καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν πέσῃ, ...

in the seventh, a craftsman or farmer; in the eighth, a sophist or democrat; in the ninth, a tyrant.²⁰

Several points are worth noting. First and most obvious, there is the location of philosophers in the paramount position and their identification with true appreciation of love, beauty, and music. Second, there is the rough treatment accorded to poets (sixth position), consistent with Plato's attacks on poetry in Books II and X of the *Republic*. Third, the way religious authority is handled (in the fifth position), to exclude priests and include only seers and those presiding over mystery initiations. Finally, there is the shocking degradation of democrats, who are placed in eighth position, just a notch above tyrants. Whereas most Athenians would understand democracy as the antithesis to tyranny (a system they found particularly threatening in the 370s), Plato assigns that role to philosophy, with which both tyranny and democracy stand in a polar contrast.

Returning to the theme of the soul's fate, once it has fallen into a human body, it turns to the task of regaining its wings. This involves a series of rebirths, in which one should live justly (*dikaiôs*, 248a) and, if necessary, paying penalties through punishments under the earth. The process is long and difficult for all, but not equally so. Those souls who consistently choose the life of 'guileless philosophers or philosophical lovers'²¹ need only three thousand years to accomplish what takes everyone else ten thousand. This is because the growth of wings depends on the soul's recollection (*anamnêsis*, 249c) of the ideal forms it beheld in the hyperuranian, and philosophers are those who have such memory (*mnêmês*, 249c), while others are more subject to forgetfulness (*lêthê*, 248c).²² The various arguments embedded in Plato's extravagant mythic narrative constitute the following set of associations and oppositions: (Table 1)

20 Pl. *Phdr.* 248de: τότε νόμος ταύτην μὴ φυτεῦσαι εἰς μηδεμίαν θήρειον φύσιν ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ γενέσει, ἀλλὰ τὴν μὲν πλεῖστα ἰδοῦσαν εἰς γονὴν ἀνδρὸς γενησομένου φιλοσόφου ἢ φιλοκάλου ἢ μουσικοῦ τινος καὶ ἐρωτικοῦ, τὴν δὲ δευτέραν εἰς βασιλέως ἐννόμου ἢ πολεμικοῦ καὶ ἀρχικοῦ, τρίτην εἰς πολιτικοῦ ἢ τινος οἰκονομικοῦ ἢ χρηματιστικοῦ, τετάρτην εἰς φιλοπόνου <ἢ> γυμναστικοῦ ἢ περὶ σώματος ἴασίν τινος ἐσομένου, πέμπτην μαντικὸν βίον ἢ τινα τελεστικὸν ἔξουσαν· ἕκτην ποιητικὸς ἢ τῶν περὶ μίμησίν τις ἄλλος ἀρμόσει, ἑβδόμη δημιουργικὸς ἢ γεωργικὸς, ὄγδοη σοφιστικὸς ἢ δημοκοπικὸς, ἐνάτη τυραννικὸς.

21 Pl. *Phdr.* 249a: ἢ τοῦ φιλοσοφήσαντος ἀδόλως ἢ παιδευραστήσαντος μετὰ φιλοσοφίας.

22 Pl. *Phdr.* 248e-249d, especially 249c. Also relevant are pieces of the discussion at 246de, 248cd, and 250ac.

Philosophers	:	Non-philosophers
Ideal forms	:	Mere appearances
Truth (<i>alêtheia</i> , 249b)	:	Opinion (<i>trophê doxatê</i> , 248b)
Memory	:	Forgetfulness
Closer to heaven	:	Closer to earth
Closer to gods	:	Closer to animals
3,000 year cycle	:	10,000 year cycle
Elite minority (<i>oligai</i> , 250a)	:	The rest

Table 1: Binary contrasts in Plato's account of ascent to the hyperuranian (Pl. *Phdr.* 246a-249d).

Plato adds another set of associations when he correlates the different sorts of souls to the deities they follow, explaining that people model themselves after their favored gods and also choose their lovers for resemblance to them (252d). He does not carry this discussion to completion, however, but treats three deities only, who are sufficient to mark the limits of the system and to establish the points he cares about most.²³ Thus, the souls who follow Zeus—the 'great sovereign in heaven' (*me-gas hêgemôn en ouranôi*, 246e)—take lovers who are 'philosophic and sovereign' (*philosophos te kai hêgemonikos*, 252e), while followers of Hera prefer those of a kingly type (*basilikon*, 253b). Philosophers thus are associated with sovereignty, and outrank kings by as much as Zeus outranks Hera, *i.e.* as much as husbands outrank wives. Followers of Ares—the brutish god of war, who seems associated with the tyrants—are jealous, violent, and even suicidal in their dealings with those unfortunate enough to be the objects of their affections (252c). The hierar-chic series of souls and that of the gods are thus brought into alignment, as shown in Table 2.

23 Pl. *Phdr.* 252c-253b. On this passage and its points of disjuncture from other parts of the dia-logue, see Dyson 1982.

Rank	Soul	Deity
1	Philosophers	Zeus
2	Kings	Hera
3	Men of Affairs (statesman and businessman)	
4	Specialists of the body (athletes and healers)	
5	Religious experts (mantic and telestic)	
6	Poets	
7	Producers (artisans and farmers)	
8	Sophists and Democrats	
9	Tyrants	Ares

Table 2: Rank ordering of souls as given in Pl. *Phdr.* 248de and their correlation to the deities they follow into the hyperuranian (252c-253b).

It is difficult not to perceive the self interest when a philosopher articulates a model of social hierarchy that has philosophers at its apex. Moreover, we need to recall that in Plato's lifetime the term 'philosopher' was not the accepted designator for practitioners of a well-established discipline or profession, but a new and idiosyncratic term, quite possibly a neologism, through which Plato distinguished himself and his circle from their numerous rivals.²⁴ Michael Morgan's remarks are particularly appropriate.

'The Platonic dialogues are sufficient testimony by themselves that in the fourth century the terminology for verbal crafts (*tekhnai*) was not yet firmly fixed. Not only confusion but also appropriation was possible. Sophists, rhapsodes, orators, poets, rhetoricians, philosophers—all these and more claimed territorial rights, but the boundaries shift and slide. Individuals moved from one domain to another, clinging to or changing titles as they or others saw fit The Platonic dialogues written during the 380s and 370s plot some of these movements and expose some of these conflicts, always reflecting on Plato's developing conception of philosophical inquiry

24 Note the way the term *philosophos* is introduced at *Phaedrus* 278d, in pointed contrast to the older *sophos*. For the fullest historical study of the lexemes *philosophos* and *philosophiê*, with insistence on the radical novelty and formative import of Plato's usage see Dixsaut 1985.

and his need to carve out a special domain, strategy, and enterprise for that title to denominate.²⁵

One can go further still. The dialogues did not just ‘plot’ the movements or ‘expose’ the conflicts: they were among the most potent weapons with which those conflicts were fought. The discourse through which Plato constituted the entity thereafter known as ‘philosophy’ was simultaneously a prescription of method, a claim of paramount privilege, and a sustained polemic against a host of rivals, old and new.

V

Let us now compare Plato’s account with two earlier texts with which he and his audience were quite familiar. The first is a fragment from Pindar that Plato himself quoted as the starting point for his earliest discussion of metempsychosis.²⁶ The poem can probably be dated around 476 BCE and set in a Sicilian milieu.²⁷

Those from whom Persephone receives compensation for ancient sorrow
She gives their souls back to the sun
In their ninth year. From them arise noble kings,
Those men swift in strength and those greatest in wisdom,
And for the rest of time they are called undefiled heroes in the presence of men.²⁸

Here Pindar identifies three types of persons who receive particularly favorable re-births, constituting them as the set of ‘undefiled heroes’ (*heroes hagnoi*) who stand above the rest of humanity. These are listed in what appears to be rank order: kings first, then men of strength (*i.e.* the athletes Pindar celebrated in his poetry), and last men of wisdom, presumably poets and sages. It is also possible, however, to consider the list in inverse order, with the wise first and kings last, and the most

25 Morgan 1990:158.

26 Pindar, fr. 133 (Snell [127 Bowra]), quoted by Plato at *Meno* 81bc. Empedocles is also discussed in the same dialogue, although on a different topic (76cd).

27 This follows from its strong thematic similarities to *Olympian* 2, which Pindar composed for Theron, tyrant of Acragas, to honor his Olympic victory in 476. Given the Sicilian, and more specifically Acragantine locus for Pindar’s and Empedocles’ writings, several authors have speculated that Plato became familiar with their ideas on reincarnation during his first Sicilian sojourn. See Long 1948, Zuntz 1971, and Demand 1975.

28 Pindar, fr. 133 (Snell):

οἷσι δὲ Φερσεφόνα ποινὰν παλαιοῦ πένθεος
δέξεται, ἐς τὸν ὑπερθεὺν ἄλιον κείνων ἐνάτω ἔτει
ἀντιδοῖ ψυχὰς πάλιν, ἐκ τῶν βασιλῆες ἀγαυοὶ
καὶ σθένει κραίπνοὶ σοφία τε μέγιστοι
ἄνδρες αὖξοντ' ἑς δὲ τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον ἦροες ἀ-
γνοὶ πρὸς ἀνθρώπων καλέονται.

interesting possibility of all is that the text contains intentional ambiguity, such that the poet could claim primacy for himself and his brethren, without offending their royal patrons, whom he permitted to imagine themselves in the position of honor.

Slightly different was the system offered by Empedocles of Acragas (active between 477-432), who offered himself as an example of the process through which souls endure a lengthy cycle of rebirths to purify themselves for an act of primordial sin.²⁹ These lives unfold over some 'thirty thousand seasons' (=10,000 years)³⁰ and they traverse the cosmic spheres, birth as plants, fish, and birds being correlated with the elements of earth, water, and air respectively.³¹ Within each category, different lives were ranked according to their dignity and purity, birth as a laurel (the plant sacred to Apollo) being highest among plants and as a lion highest among animals.³²

A series of human births was expected to complete this process and to culminate in rebirth as a god, whereupon the soul would return to the fiery empyrean. Empedocles maintained that he himself was on the verge of such apotheosis, having completed the human lives he took to be noblest.

Dear friends—you who dwell in the great town on the heights of the city
Above golden Acragas, attending to good deeds,
Respectful havens for strangers, unacquainted with evil—
Greetings! I go about you as an immortal god,
No longer mortal, honored by all, as is fitting,
Crowned with fillets and festive garlands.
I am worshipped by all those I encounter,
Men and women, as I enter their flourishing towns. They follow me,
Thousands of them all together, asking where is the advantageous path.
Some have need of the divinatory arts, and some ask to hear
The utterance of good healing for all sorts of diseases,
Being pierced too long with grievous pains.³³

On the verge of godhood, he is still sought for healing and prophecy and he also implicitly presents himself as a poet by writing in epic verse. A closely related fragment hammers the point home.

Toward the end [of the rebirth cycle] souls become seers, poets, healers,
And princes among earth-dwelling people.
And from this state they shoot up [as] gods, best in honor.³⁴

29 On Empedocles and his text entitled *Katharmoi* ('Purifications'), see Chitwood 1986, Panagiotou 1983, Wright 1981, and Zuntz 1971:179-274.

30 τρίς ... μυριάς ὄρας. fr. 31B115.6 (Diels-Kranz).

31 Fr. 31B117.

32 Fr. 31B127.

Most interesting here is the way Empedocles downgrades royal authority, which he lists fourth and for which he uses a slightly unusual term (*promoi*, 'chiefs' or 'princes,' rather than *basileus*). Moreover it is the sole incarnation he does not claim for himself and the ancient biographic tradition tells that he rejected the kingship of Acragas when offered to him.³⁵ On this point, his ranking of human lives was markedly original, as was his unprecedented view of himself as divine, but in other ways he gives a fairly conventional list of those who would have been regarded as 'the masters of truth in archaic Greece,' when the technology of writing and the democratic *polis* had not yet undermined those whose position and authority depended on claims of inspired speech.³⁶ It thus becomes clear that Plato ratcheted all the categories most highly regarded by his predecessors down some notches to make room at the top for the new category of philosophers he wished to construct as a dominant elite (Figure 1).

33 Fr. 31B112:

ὦ φίλοι, οἱ μέγα ἄστῳ κατὰ ξανθοῦ Ἀκράγαντος
ναίετ' ἄν' ἄκρα πόλεος, ἀγαθῶν μελεδήμονες ἔργων,
ξείνων αἰδοῖοι λιμένες, κακότητος ἄπειροι,
χαίρετ' ἐγὼ δ' ὑμῖν θεὸς ἄμβροτος, οὐκέτι θνητὸς
πωλεῦμαι μετὰ πᾶσι τετιμένος, ὥσπερ ἔοικα,
ταινίαις τε περίστεπτος στέφασίν τε θαλείοις.
<πᾶσι δὲ> τοῖς ἄν' ἴκωμαι ἐς ἄστεα τηλεθάοντα,
ἀνδράσιν ἠδὲ γυναιξί, σεβίζομαι· οἱ δ' ἄμ' ἔπονται
μυρῖοι ἐξερέοντες, ὅπη πρὸς κέρδος ἀταρπός,
οἱ μὲν μαντοσυνέων κεχρημένοι, οἱ δ' ἐπὶ νούσων
παντοίων ἐπύθοντο κλύειν εὐηκέα βάζιν,
δηρὸν δὴ χαλεπῆσι πεπαρμένοι <ἄμφ' ὀδύνησι>.

34 Fr. 31B146:

εἰς δὲ τέλος μάντιες τε καὶ ὕμνοπόλοι καὶ ἰητροί
καὶ πρόμοι ἀνθρώποισιν ἐπιχθονίοισι πέλονται,
ἔνθεν ἀναβλαστοῦσι θεοὶ τιμῆσι φέριστοι

35 Diog. Laert. 8.63, who cites Aristotle as his source for depicting Empedocles as an ardent democrat. The tradition is hardly trustworthy, but cannot be dismissed altogether. For a discussion of the political struggles in Acragas during Empedocles' life and his possible role in them, see Asheri 1990.

36 Detienne 1967. Poets and kings were already singled out by Hes. *Theog.* 81-104 (see also *Hom. Od.* 17.384-86). The status of seers and healers in the epic is also exceedingly high, as seen in such figures as Calchas, Teiresias, Melampus, Machaon, etc., not to mention the Sibyl and Pythia. See further Grottanelli 1982.

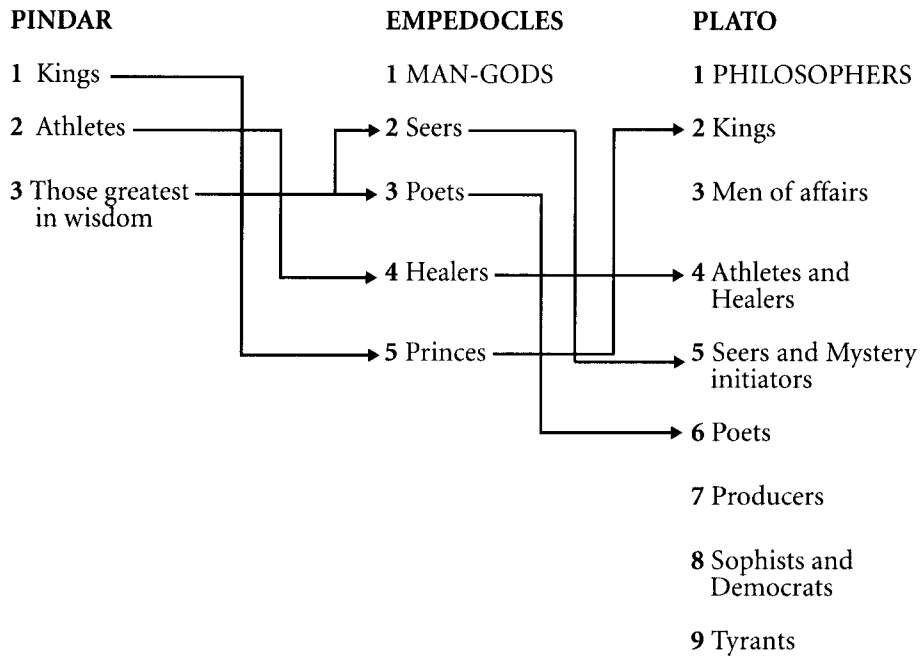


Figure 1: Hierarchies of birth in Pindar (c. 476 BCE), Empedocles (c. 432), and Plato (c. 370). With each recalibration of the system, the list becomes longer, a new category is introduced in the paramount position, and others are downgraded to make way for it.

Like Pindar, Empedocles, and probably others, Plato offered a mythic variant on the theme of metempsychosis that recalibrated the operative taxonomy of human excellence, hoping thereby to reorganize the social order. In its most audacious moment, his myth sought to establish a new elite, demoting older ones as necessary, while consigning newer rivals—sophists and democrats—to the bottom of the pile. Elsewhere, however, Plato seems much less daring, particularly in the incidental imagery he scattered through his narrative. Although he offered some innovative twists on each, winged chariots,³⁷ heavenly meadows,³⁸ three and ten thousand year cycles,³⁹ laws of Retribution,⁴⁰ and contrasts of memory and forgetfulness⁴¹ were familiar parts of earlier otherworld accounts. By including them,

37 Cf. Hom. *Il.* 5.837, 8.41, 13.23, 16.148; Parmenides, fr. 28B1.1-10, Empedocles, fr. 31B3.5. Note also the use of a similar comparison between the soul and a chariot in *Katha Upanisad* 1.3.3-9.

38 Regarding the *leimôn* and *alêtheias pedion* of 248b, cf. Hom. *Od.* 11.539 (*asphodelos leimôn*), Empedocles, fr. 31B121 (*Atês ... leimôna*), Pl. *Resp.* x 614e, 616b. See further Courcelle 1975.

39 On millennial cycles, cf. Empedocles fr. 31B115.6 (*tris min myriasis ôras*), Hdt. 2.123, Aesch. *PV* 94, and see van der Waerden 1952.

Plato catered to the traditional expectations of his audience, while probing that tradition for strategic possibilities and advantage.

Within Plato's lifetime and primarily as the result of his initiatives, philosophers did displace poets, seers, and others within the hierarchized ranks of intellect and speech, although they never fulfilled his greatest ambitions by acceding to positions of paramount political power. Looking closely at his work helps us understand something about the instrumentality of myth, and also sharpens our sense of what happened in Greece during the 4th century. The mythic narrative we have considered marks a skirmish in the massive campaign Plato waged on behalf of himself, his circle, their practices and their values. Beyond this, I hope it affords an instructive example of how subtle, supple, and effective a discursive instrument myth can be.

40 To the *thesmos* ... *Adrasteias* 248c, cf. Pind. fr. 133 (Snell) (*poinan palaiou pentheos*), *Ol.* 2.60 (*logon ... anagkai*), Empedocles, fr. 31B115.1 (*Anagkês khrêma*).

41 On the mythology of Mnêmosynê and Lêthê, cf. the 'Orphic' tablets, such as that found at Petelia (fr. 32a, Kern) or the Oracle of Trophonius, described by Paus. 9.39.7-8. See further Lincoln 1991: 49-61, Vernant 1965, and Kerényi 1945.

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To lock up Eleusis. A question of liminal space

Dag Øistein Endsjø

HAVING TRAVELLED to the land of the dead, Heracles, the archetypal hero, made a novel suggestion: 'Lock up Eleusis and the sacred fire,' he said.¹ Thus he proposed to put an end to what Cicero called the best of all 'excellent and indeed divine institutions that Athens has brought forth and contributed to human life' (Cic. *Leg.* 2.36). It is not, however, that Heracles did not acknowledge the intrinsic value of the mysteries, but through his ultimate experience it seems that the hero had found the very pattern upon which the Eleusinian mysteries were based: 'I have experienced far truer mysteries ... I have seen Korê' (Vogliano 1937:177).

That death is a central element in Heracles' ultimate experience is obvious. Just as important, however, is how the hero reached this point geographically. Heracles' story is not one of dying and subsequent resurrection, it is one of going to Hades while still alive. As this journey to the land of the dead would entail extensive travelling through vast and—from a Greek point of view—uncivilised landscapes, I wish to argue that it is not only the contemplating of Korê that reflects the experience of the Eleusinian mysteries. The encounter with the queen of Hades represents only the climax of the long ordeal of this ultimate, spatial passage.² Also the Argonauts prepared for their perilous journey to the ends of the earth through being initiated. Going through the mysteries of the Cabeiri on the island of Samothrace ensured that the heroes with 'greater safety could sail over the chilling sea.'³

The novel suggestion of Heracles as recorded on a second century AD papyrus found in Egyptian Tebtunis (cf. Vogliano 1937:175-76), is also reflected in Euripides' fifth century BC tragedy *Heracles*. Here, too, the hero succeeded in his journey to the land of the dead, this time, however, only because he had *previously* gone

1 Vogliano 1937, 176-77. '[]λόγοι Ἡρακλέους μὴ ἐωμέ[νου τελ]εῖσθαι τὰ Ἐλευσίνα. [πάλαι μ]εμ<ύ>ημαι. ἀπόκλει[σον τὴν Ἐ]λευσεῖνα καὶ τὸ πῦρ [τὸ ἱερόν,] δαδοῦχε, καὶ φθό[νει νυκ]τὸς ἱερᾶς· μυστήρια [πολλῶ ἀ]ληθέστερα μεμύημαι ... τὴν Κόρην εἶδον.' Heracles said: 'To go through that of Eleusis do not satiate me. I have [just] been initiated. Lock up Eleusis and the sacred [fire], torch-bearer (an officer at the Eleusinian mysteries), envy the sacred night. I have been initiated into [far] truer mysteries ... I have seen Korê.' I owe it to Walter Burkert for being aware of this text.

through the rites of Eleusis (Eur. *HF* 610-13). Thus, also Euripides implied that there was a close relation between the experience of the mysteries and that of travelling in the uncivilised landscapes.

All of these examples indicate a certain cultural pattern, a pattern so central and enduring within the ancient Greek world view that it could be reflected in the classical plays of Euripides, just as much as in late Hellenistic papyri six centuries later. Going through the mysteries would in some way prepare the traveller for the extreme journey not only to the land of the dead, but also to the uncultivated landscapes of the periphery in general. It seems that what we are presented with is a landscape somehow linked with the Greek rites of passage, a certain geography of initiation. It is at least obvious that the more distant areas of the Greek world view played a very distinct part in this ritual universe. The main question thus becomes, how and to what degree the Greek understanding of space may be understood as being analogous to the highly ritually manipulated moments of time in the rites of passage. Is there such a thing as an ancient Greek space of passage? Can one operate with a notion of *liminal space* within the ancient Greek world view?

The theories of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner

The *rites of passage* as first defined by Arnold van Gennep in his influential book of the same name (van Gennep [1960, orig.1909]), include the sequence of three phases: first the subject has to go through a rite of segregation from his or her previous role in society. Then he or she goes through an intermediate phase, before finally being reaggregated into his or her new role.

Victor Turner is the scholar who with the greatest success has elaborated van Gennep's theories, most importantly by coining the term *liminality*. This term referred to van Gennep's 'liminal state' or 'interstructural situation' that Turner found typical for that intermediate phase between the ritual separation and aggre-

- 2 Indeed, most versions will render how Heracles descended into Hades through some crevice in the earth's surface usually in Greece proper. When Odysseus met Heracles at the border of Hades, the implication is nevertheless that Heracles, when alive, had travelled the same route as Odysseus, that is, sailing across Oceanus to the uttermost end of the world and there entering Hades (*Hom. Od.* 11.620-26; cf. *ibid.* 10.508-12). Also the late fifth century BC tragedian Euripides writes of Heracles' sailing to Hades (... τὸν πολυδάκρυον ἔπλευσ' ἐς Ἄϊδα ... Eur. *HF* 426-27), though he also at the same time operates with the more traditional descent. A passage by the first or second century AD mythographer Pseudo-Apollodorus seems pretty much to reflect the story of Heracles in the *Odyssey*, rendering how the hero crossed Oceanus and then encountered the cattle of Hades and their herdsman Menoetes (*Apollod. Bibl.* 2.5.10). Even though this story actually refers to Heracles' getting the herd of the giant Geryon, Hades' cattle and the herdsman are the same the ultimate hero meets when he is about to enter the dank abode to fetch Cerberus (*Apollod. Bibl.* 2.5.12). This suggests again that the crossing the Oceanus to the literal end of the world could have been Heracles' original way of reaching Hades.
- 3 Aesch. according to Ath. 428f; cf. also Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.915-18. and Bremmer 1998:99-100.

gation from and to proper social roles: This is 'a realm ... *betwixt and between* ... any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognised' (Turner 1967:93, 94). Having to be bordered by one opposite at either side between which it may represent a state of transition, the interstructural or liminal state is consequently defined by what it *is not*.

Turner also pointed to a general sense of confusion and ambiguity that he found typical of this initiatory mid state. Normally incompatible elements of the conditions, in between which the interstructural state is found, will be paradoxically juxtaposed and recombined. It 'may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise' (Turner 1967:97). Every element of existence may be found severed from its usual context, juxtaposed by its usually mutually exclusive opposite, and assembled into new, totally nonsensical combinations. Thus, all the usual social states of gender, age, hierarchy, as well as even more basic opposites as human versus divine, human versus animal, dead versus alive, may be negated and reverted in the liminal state.

Regardless of whether one considers van Gennep's rites of passage a universal phenomenon or not, his liminal state, as has been emphasised in a large number of studies, offers a pattern that fits well with the structure of the various ancient Greek mysteries and other transitional rites leading the subject from one culturally recognised state to another.⁴ Van Gennep himself, in fact, based his theories to a large degree on the structures of the ancient mysteries and other Greek transitional rites.⁵ Examples such as the reversal of gender roles, outright cross-dressing, the dressing up as animals, the symbolical intermingling with gods, apparent sacrilege and even pseudo-cannibalism, all fit well within this ambiguous pattern.

I am, however, using the term *liminality* with caution. This is partly because the term has almost acquired a status of being a universal phenomenon, apparently independent from the various cultural contexts. Moreover, there is an increasing tendency, initiated by the late Turner himself, of applying the term to the most various phenomena, often quite unrelated to actual transitional rites. In my use of the term liminality I will therefore ask the reader to be aware that I always keep to its initial meaning, as an analytical tool intimately connected to the intermediate phase of the ritual transition. When I turn to the Greek material, I will, therefore, use the term 'liminal' only for phenomena which the Greeks themselves considered connected to the intermediate phase of their rites of passage. It is subsequent-

4 See e.g. Burkert (1987), Marinatos 1995, Nelis 1991, Redfield 1990, Scully 1990, Versnel 1990, and Vidal-Naquet 1986.

5 Cf. van Gennep 1960:18, 37, 89-91.

ly also important to keep in mind that liminality, of course, was not a term of the ancient Greeks.

Even though the theories of van Gennep and Turner have proven helpful for the understanding of ancient transitional rituals, they can only bring us part of the way towards a theory of how the Greek could operate with such an intimate connection between their rites of passage and the geographical periphery, as how they perceived that area. When developing his definition of the temporal phase of the rite of passage, Arnold van Gennep saw the territorial border zones between the more clearly defined areas as not only structurally identical with the intermediate period of transitional rituals, but considered the physical passage as the very *origin* of the rites of spiritual passage (Gennep 1960:22). If we look to the structural implication of this idea of a transitional area, we realise that this is an area that is defined by what it is not—just as the liminal state in the rites of passage. It is something like a spatial remain, a non-structuralised border area that appears only as other, culturally recognised areas are defined away from it.

In this way, van Gennep opened up for the idea that there are certain border areas that represent a mental and social transition for the person who traverses it. It seems that van Gennep's theories also include a notion of *liminal space*, even though he did not use that exact term. Was, however, van Gennep right in thinking that space, just as well as the manipulated time of the rites of passage, could be the medium for the interstructural state of liminality? And if he was correct, how is the term *liminal space* going to help us understand the intimate relation between the geographical periphery and the Greek initiatory rites? As van Gennep refrained from any further theoretical elaboration of these spatial theories, he does not provide us with any more means for seeing how the ancient Greeks constructed their world in such a way that there existed an interrelation between the intermediate state of their rites of passage and the most distant parts of their world.

Victor Turner was in no way unaware of that space could play an important part within a given cultural context. His understanding of any possible connection between space and liminality was, however, in no way straightforward. In his studies on pilgrimage, he would use a spatial understanding of van Gennep's threshold analogy, referring to how a 'pilgrimage center, from the standpoint of the believing actor, also represents a threshold, a place and moment "in and out of time"' (Turner 1974:197). For Turner certain places, like Rome and Mecca, remain 'fundamentally liminal to the entire world of political organisation' (Turner & Turner 1978:168). This pattern of single places of liminality may be summed in how he considered a 'spatial location of liminality' as an area 'clearly set apart' (Turner & Turner 1978:4). This understanding of spatial liminality, however, is contradictory not only to van Gennep's idea of liminal space as representing an essentially unstructured area, but also to Turner's own notion of liminality generally being 'a

realm ... *betwixt and between* ... any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognised' (Turner 1967:93, 94). By describing it as an area 'clearly set apart' Turner made his understanding of spatial liminality into an example of a 'stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognised'—the very notion in absolute contradiction to his own idea of ritual liminality.

While van Gennep saw the undefined, transitional areas as loaded with meaning projected onto it by the culture that contemplated it, Turner considered the culturally undefined space as a neutral ground that could only acquire a quality of liminality through some liminal ritual taking place there. His notion that space only acquires meaning through ritual performance, is evident both in his analyses of Ndembu ritual and in his study of different pilgrimages. Writing on pilgrimage and initiation, he summed up: 'The former liminalizes time; the latter, space' (Turner 1992:39).

As culturally recognised places are carved out of an originally undefined territory, huge areas will also remain outside of these culturally recognised frames. Turner, however, did not recognise how these spatial 'remains,' also represent cultural constructions (*cf.* Endsjø 1997). He thus failed to appreciate how spatial entities were perceived to possess an *autonomous* liminal status within a given world view.

This autonomy of the geographical, liminal space is the notion that must be considered to lie behind Heracles' claim that he no longer had any need for the Eleusinian mysteries after his extensive travelling in the distant geography. In this case the periphery seems to possess a certain liminal aspect—the same phenomenological essence as the intermediate phase of the transitional rites.

In spite of his own not very helpful geographical elaborations, Turner's original definition of liminality does nevertheless not have to be restricted to temporal categories. His understanding of liminality as 'a realm ... *betwixt and between* ... any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognised,' may easily be applied to aspects of space, in accordance with van Gennep's original insight.

The intermingling of life and death

Parallel to how the uttermost periphery was considered rather like a spatial image of the rites of passage, the uncultivated areas right outside of the city walls were used as the venue for a number of Greek initiatory rites: here young boys would attain maturity and the right to citizenship. The Athenian *ephebes*, for example, would be sent out to the wild mountainsides and there have their civic status forever altered, while Cretan youths on the brink of manhood would be abducted into the wilderness by older lovers (Strabo 10.4.21). Bringing somebody to these areas just outside the *polis* meant that he or she was removed from civil society more than just spatially. The myths of many of the great heroes reflect a similar

mechanism. While Achilles, Actaeon, Aristaeüs, Asclepius, Jason and later also his son, Medus, all reached their manhood in the wild landscapes of the centaur Chiron, the adolescent Odysseus was sent to the mountain slopes of Parnassus where he experienced an initiatory ordeal through the instructions of his maternal grandfather, Autolycus.⁶

As indicated by these various examples of apparently liminal incidents, the most distant geography and the wasteland just outside of the cultivated areas did not represent regions that were essentially different from each other. In the *Bacchae* Euripides clearly demonstrated that this was the case, as he had the mountainsides just outside of Thebes filled with native women celebrating the mythical prototype of the Dionysian mysteries together with the god himself and his entourage of foreign women. All the areas not under the cultivation of the Greek *polis* may, in fact, be summed up by the term the *eschatia*, the furthest part. This term not only applied to the most distant periphery, but was also generally used for the uncultivated areas bordering immediately on the civilised geography (Hartog 1988:13).

Thus, if we shall operate with a notion of *liminal space* within the Greek world view, this would be the *eschatia*, which covered everything that was considered uncivilised geography: the mountains, the forests, the barbarian lands, and the seas. The only trait common to all of these areas, was that they all lay *outside of the Greek city walls*, which were symbolically representing the limits of civilised society. The *eschatia*, the landscapes that the ancient Greeks repeatedly related to the experience of the rites of passage, stretched accordingly from the hinterland just outside the *polis* to the uttermost periphery at the ends of the earth.

Having proposed that the Greek *eschatia* represented a *liminal space* by pointing to a number of examples where this area apparently reflected the intermediate state of various Greek rites of passage, our next task will be to see how the ancient Greeks constructed their world view in such a way that they logically could perceive this interrelation. As Victor Turner emphasised, it is the placement betwixt and between two culturally recognised stable conditions that creates the intermediate state of the rites of passage. If the *eschatia* was a *geographical* area that was situated between different sets of stable culturally recognised *geographical* conditions, we shall therefore have a structural parallel to the middle phase of the ancient Greek rites of passage.

Looking for stable geographical conditions, we will, of course, find the Greek *polis* as a natural point of departure. Through its mere presence, the *polis* not only

6 Achilles in *Il.* 11.831-32; Actaeon in *Apollod. Bibl.* 3.4.4; Aristaeüs in *Ap. Rhod. Argon.* 2.509-10; Asclepius in *Il.* 4.218-19, and in *Pind. Pyth.* 3.5-7; Jason in *Pind. Pyth.* 4.102; Jason's son Medus in *Hes. Theog.* 1001-2; and Odysseus in *Hom. Od.* 19.392-96.

defined the *eschatia* as its geographical periphery, but was also the area that represented the only place of true humanity. *Without polis*, man was 'either a beast or a god,' as Aristotle pointed out (*Arist. Pol.* 1253a). The city defined a space which in itself was humanising. The space of the *polis* constituted a stable and culturally recognised geographical condition representing a certain cultural pattern that pertained to all aspects of the proper human existence.

It is important, however, also to include the cultivated land, the *chora*, within the notion of the human *polis*. With the exception of Sparta,⁷ there was no city state, as far as I know, whose *chora* in any way represented an entity radically different from the more urbanised space of the *polis*: the city area and the cultivated land together constituted the land of human civilisation.

The *polis* was nevertheless not an eternal entity. For its continued existence, the city depended upon its denizens living according to a number of cultural rules that defined them as humans. A serious negligence or reversal of any of these crucial practices would be tantamount to dehumanising the space of the *polis*. Among these essential activities were the practice of sacrifice and agriculture, the eating of bread, the necessity of working for survival, and, most importantly, a number of clear lines set up for keeping death on the outside (*cf.* Endsjø 2000). Defining the space of human life, the *polis* would not tolerate death in its midst and demanded that ritual precautions should be made to keep the city safe from pollution caused by any occurrence of death. Within a prescribed time, anyone who died within the parameters of the city walls was literally carried out of the space of the *polis* through the ritual of the *ekphora*.⁸

The fact that *polis* represented the only space where proper human life might be fulfilled, suggests that the *polis* may be considered to reflect a perceived *space of life*. The great precautions for keeping death outside the city walls further indicate that the realm diametrically *opposite* to the existence of *polis* was that of human death. However, if the definition of the *polis* as the *space of life* may appear somewhat original, the quest for a *space of death* will not lead us into uncharted territories: *Hades*, or the land of the dead, was a well known entity within the Greek world view.

Mirroring how *polis* represented a territory where everything reflected the notions of human life, *Hades* represented a space where everything was death. The

7 The Spartan *krypteiai*, young men in their transitional period, would roam their own countryside as well as the *eschatia*, harassing and even killing unfortunate Helots, public slaves not belonging to the city space proper (*cf.* Osborne 1987:150). It is because the very existence of these Spartan citizens-to-be in all manners was removed from the agricultural sphere of their society, that the cultivated land, the *chora*, for the Spartans also could represent an area of transition along with the uncultivated mountainsides and other wastelands.

8 Solon according to *Dem.* 43.62, *Pl. Leg.* 960a, *Antiph.* 6.34.

most important aspect of Hades in this context, however, will be its location. Just as death was man's ultimate temporal limit, the space in which humans might venture was also ultimately bounded by death. There was subsequently (as indicated at the start of this article) an explicit notion that death *could* be reached geographically. Odysseus' journey to the land of the dead was definitely a geographical adventure, as the hero went by the river Oceanus, beyond the island of Circe at the end of the earth, to the borders of the land of the dead (Hom. *Od.* 10.508-12). Accordingly, the peoples of the absolute geographical periphery, such as Homer's Cimmerians, were said to live closer to the dead (Hom. *Od.* 11.12-15).

The utmost boundaries of the world represented a spatial reflection of how man ceased to exist beyond his own human limits. The term used was *to peras* or *to peirar*—that is an end, limit, boundary—regardless whether the matter in question was that of the end of the world, the temporal borders of the human life (cf. Soph. *OT* 1530), or even the limit of man's physical performance. As man's limitations thus were reflected in both a temporal, a physical, as well as in a geographical manner, common to all three dimensions was that there was a limit of human potential beyond which one touched upon the realm where man was not.⁹ These borders were equal to the Homeric and Hesiodic *peirata gaiês*¹⁰—the very end of the world beyond which the world no longer existed.

The different spaces of the *eschatia*, the *polis*, and Hades all represented different patterns that made certain ways of existence either possible or impossible. In the way it was culturally constructed, space seems in this way to have represented a rather uncompromising factor within the world view of ancient Greece (cf. Endsjø 2000). A certain spatial entity would embrace all aspects of the reality it was considered to reflect. Thus, there would always appear an intimate connection between any given area and that which belonged within it.

When the existential dichotomy of human *life* and *death* in this way was transferred onto the externalised reality of space, we find that this duality was expanded into the more comprehensive dichotomy of *being* and *non-being*. The notion of the nothingness of Hades was subsequently also repeatedly emphasised: the dead encountered by Odysseus were completely powerless, immaterial shadows without a

9 Building on this understanding of these as related phenomena, the fifth century BC poet Pindar used the Pillars of Heracles as a metaphor to hail the highest achievements of the athletes in the Panhellenic games (*Nem.* 3.20-23; cf. *Isthm.* 4.11-12). 'Pindar measures the prowess of his athlete-patrons in geographic terms, seeing their victories as journeys into distant space' (Romm 1992:18). One could only reach as far as the Pillars, 'further is impassable (ἄβατον) for both wise and unwise' (*Ol.* 3.44-45). In his Pythian odes (*Pyth.* 10.27-30) Pindar wrote of the land of the Hyperboreans as a similar metaphor for the utmost limit (περαίνειν πρὸς ἔσχατον) of the athlete.

10 *Il.* 8.478-79, 14.200, 14.301; Hom. *Od.* 4.563, 9.284; *Hymn. Hom. Ven.* 227; Hes. *Theog.* 334-35, 518, 622, 731; *peirata pontoio* in *Il.* 8.478-79; *peirath' Okeanos* in *Od.* 11.13.

speck of wisdom (*Od.* 10.494-95), while the cap of Hades donned its wearer the guise of invisibility (*Il.* 5.844-45). This consistent immateriality of Hades indicates an actual notion of inspatiality in the land of the dead. This quality of non-being was also reflected in an actual timelessness in Hades, as indicated by the way 'the *psychê* of the dead' was thought to be 'frozen in time at the moment of death' (Keuls 1974:14)—or more precisely: the immaterial form of the dead remained forever in the state that it was at the moment of the final transposal to Hades. Men who had been slain in battle continued to wear their bloodstained armour (*Il.* 11.40f.), while the ghost of Clytemnestra could still display the fatal wounds that her son had given her (Aesch. *Eum.* 103). Jan N. Bremmer emphasises how the same kind of situation is depicted on vases, 'where the dead [in Hades] are regularly shown with their wounds, sometimes still bandaged' (Bremmer 1983:84). Someone who died or otherwise ended up in the land of the dead as an infant would subsequently also forever remain this way (cf. *Hymn. Hom. Merc.* 256-59). This timelessness of death relates also to the notion of a 'beautiful death': the good fortune of dying while still young and the absolute importance of keeping the body intact for the obsequies.¹¹

Having found how the two existential human opposites of life and death were projected onto the ancient Greek world map, we see that the Greek *eschatia* becomes the spatial reflection of the interstructural or liminal period a person goes through at the point of dying. This was also recognised by both Homer and Apollonius of Rhodes as they let respectively the Odyssean and the Argonautic crew, at the moment when they considered themselves to be forever lost in the liminal space of the *eschatia*, imitate the ritual drawing of a veil over one's head. This was an act performed at the moment of death, for example by Hippolytus and Socrates.¹² Also Alcestis, as she returned from death, would keep herself covered with a veil (*Eur. Alc.* 1006-125). This custom was, moreover, intimately connected to initiatory rites, such as those at the Eleusinian mysteries: the neophytes would imitate how Demeter sat on a fleece with a veil over her face.¹³ Probably not unrelated either is how the Greek bride at her point of transition into womanhood would be sporting a veil.

11 Cf. Vernant 1991:50-74. Even the gods recognised this and would sometimes see to it that the corpse of someone who was especially dear to them would not in any way suffer harm (e.g. Hector's body in *Il.* 23.184-91).

12 *Od.* 10.179; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.1294-96; *Eur. Hipp.* 1457-58; *Pl. Phd.* 118a; cf. *Eur. HF* 1159-1231. The crew of Odysseus drew their cloaks over their heads as they arrived at Circe's island, the same reaction as that of the Argonauts to their ending up in the formless landscapes of Libya.

13 Neophytes as, for example, depicted on a Neapolitan freeze. Cf. Bianchi 1976:fig. 49. Demeter in *Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 196f.

Located betwixt and between the land of the dead as the realm of absolute non-being and the *polis* as the place of ideal being, the Greek *eschatia* was sandwiched between two stable geographical conditions. As can be seen in the ritual carrying out of the deceased, the *eschatia* was the area where the dead and the living could go together in a way impossible not only in the city, but also in Hades. Only the superhuman heroes Heracles and Orpheus could successfully return from the land of the dead, while the more human Odysseus never actually entered Hades but stayed on its borders. If he had gone further he would most probably, like Theseus and Peirithoüs, not have been able to return: his entrance would have been the geographical equivalent to his physical death.

As most versions of Heracles' journey to Hades indicate, this horizontal view of a geographical land of the dead was often complemented by a concept of Hades as a lower realm: Homer artfully combined the two notions as he had the slaughtered suitors of Penelope led by Hermes 'down the dark ways,' and then, 'past the streams of Oceanus . . . , past the gates of the sun and the land of dreams.'¹⁴

If we look closer at the idea of how Hades was found both under the earth as well at the end of the earth, we find that the *eschatia* was not only placed betwixt and between two stable geographical conditions horizontally, but also vertically. Opposite Hades as a place of chthonic deities, there was, of course, also the Olympian heaven as the place of the celestial gods. The *eschatia*, the area that we originally saw as being mythically and ritually correlating with the interstructural phase of the Greek rites of passage, was thus found to exist not only betwixt and between the notion of human being and non-being, but also betwixt and between the two different divine spheres of the Olympians and of Hades.

Other examples of defining spatial liminality

Even though neither van Gennep nor Turner offered an elaborated definition of a liminal space that may be applied directly to the ancient Greek context, the term is nevertheless not totally unfamiliar in ancient Greek studies. I shall here discuss three uses of the term. However, even though all these examples offer interesting definitions, I do not consider any of them to offer a viable explanation of the intimate relation between the ancient Greek rites of passage and the geographical periphery. Stephen Scully, for example, describes a 'liminal, suburban space' existing between 'polis and *apolis*, city and mountain . . . , human and natural order' (Scully 1990:10, 13). Regardless of the fact that this ignores the initiatory connotations of all '*apolis*,' Scully never supports his use of the term by trying to link the area that he has in mind, directly or allegorically, with specific rites of passage. We are left

14 *Od.* 24.10-13; *cf.* *Eur. HF* 23-25, 426-28.

only with an expression 'liminal space' meaning nothing but a 'point of transition' which refers to going in or out of town (Scully 1990:13).

Damien P. Nelis writes about a similarly placed 'liminal stage between the city and' a not very precise 'land outside it' (Nelis 1991:99). Nelis, however, identifies this area as 'the realm of Artemis' (1991:99), and it is because of the goddess' close association with Greek transitional rites from childhood to maturity that he labels this area as liminal. This is an interesting perspective, but Nelis does not pursue this idea, either by pointing to further relations between the area in question and different rites of passage, or by looking for liminal qualities in the landscape itself. His 'liminal stage' placed 'between the city and the land outside it' also appears as a somewhat limited circle around the *polis*, and is actually severed from what he himself refers to as the 'unknown territories' where any 'long and dangerous journey' would take place (Nelis 1991:99).

The most interesting approach I have come across so far comes from Nannó Marinatos in her analysis of Circe as a liminal figure and her island as 'a liminal place' (Marinatos 1995:134). She refers to several incidents where the experiences of Odysseus and his crew mirror Greek transitional rites, especially funerary rituals. Among her examples are the guidance of Hermes, the funerary meal of honey, barley and dairy products offered to the unfortunate comrades of Odysseus, and how the crew are made into pigs, animals 'appropriate to chthonic goddesses: the transformation of the men can thus be seen as a kind of symbolic death or sacrifice.'¹⁵ She also suggests that certain natural phenomena indicate that the area itself possessed a certain liminal quality and moreover supports her interpretation by pointing to that Circe's island for Odysseus appears to be a necessary geographical stopover on the journey to and from the land of the dead. Thus, Marinatos argues, Circe functions as 'the gate-keeper of the underworld' (1995:137, 133).

However, Marinatos apparently seems to regard Circe's Aeaea as a rather singular place in the Greek world view. Through giving Circe's island this uniquely liminal position as 'a bridge between two worlds' (Marinatos 1995:133), Marinatos puts everything that belongs on the other side of this enchanted island—from the human cities to the wondrous landscapes of the Cyclopes and the Phaeacians—into one and the same territorial category. In this way she, in fact, makes several nonsensical and fantastic parts of the *eschatia* the spatial equivalent to the *polis*—defining them all as the land of the living. She disregards the many liminal references in all other places in the Greek periphery.

15 Marinatos 1995:134; for the funerary meal see *Od.* 10.234-35; *cf. ibid.* 10.516-21 and 11.26-28.

The intermingling of humans, gods, and the dead

As I have argued, the way Victor Turner defined the liminal state of the rites of passage as one 'of ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories' (Turner 1967:97), is a good way of describing both the intermediate state of the ancient Greek rites of passage. This confusion was often described with terms of the ultimate paradox of life and death as these two states represented the starting and the ending points of the most radical of all human transitions. Apuleius even called the ritual initiation a 'voluntary death' (Apul. *Met.* 11.21).

The liminal experience was, however, not comparable to the *state* of death, but to the moment of *dying*: death in its ultimate form was the realm one reached at the very other end of this interstructural experience, just as Heracles' encounter with Persephone was only the climax of his ordeal. Also Plutarch or Porphyry drew an intimate parallel between dying and the experience of the great mysteries: the two phenomena 'correspond word for word and thing for thing' (Stob. 4.52.49). Thus, according to Walter Burkert, for the initiated Greek 'real death' seemed 'no more than a repetition' of a passage already ritually performed (Burkert 1983:296).

Returning to the interstructurally placed *eschatia*, we find the same sense of ambiguity and confusion as in that which I argue was its ritual counterpart. The many different ways the *eschatia* and the intermediate period of the rites of passage seem to have been interrelated, indicate that within the ancient Greek world view there existed a structural parallel between the two phenomena. They were both representing states lacking structural stability and placed betwixt and between culturally recognised stable conditions.

The experience of the *eschatia* mirrored that of the transitional ritual. Following in the footsteps of the ancient heroes, one would discover that various aspects of death again and again appeared long *before* one reached the ultimate limit of humanity and the border of the land of the dead: elements of non-being seem somehow to be omnipresent in the *eschatia*. The vast area betwixt and between the two defined boundaries of the city walls and the end of the world, was, in fact, a broad border zone where neither of the two existential opposites of being and non-being dominated, and where they therefore paradoxically coexisted (if one may use such a term also with the notion of non-being). Immediately as he left the *polis* and its defined order of civilisation, the prototypical Greek traveller would therefore enter an area where life symbolically mingled with death, being with non-being. In an ancient ship the passengers would in this way be no further from death than the thickness of the side of the vessel.¹⁶

The mythical examples of how the *eschatia* was perceived as an area where life was paradoxically juxtaposed with death are manifold. Those who left for the *es-*

16 Anacharsis according to Diog. Laërt. 1.103.

chatia were repeatedly considered dead though they were still alive. This was the case with, for example, Pindar's Jason as he grew up in the cave of Chiron.¹⁷ Apollonius of Rhodes similarly let Jason's mother moan the second departure of her son—now as a young man—as if all hope of her being buried by him now was gone (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.268-91). Abandoned in the desert landscapes of Lemnos, Philoctetes was consequently both '*apolis*' and 'a corpse among the living' (Soph. *Phil.* 1018). The ancient seer, Phineus, was apparently also veering somewhere between life and death, as he in his isolation was not able neither to live nor to die (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.446-48). The geographical margins could in this way offer a possible existence removed from both life and death.

This connection between death and the *eschatia* is also seen in how mythical figures on the very point of death were literally removed to the geographical margins: Menelaus was promised an eternal existence after his normal life span, in the Elysian plain at the end of the world (*Od.* 4.561-65), while many of the heroes fighting around Thebes and Troy were offered an existence at the equally peripheral islands of the blessed, away from both Hades and the normal human realm (Hes. *Op.* 161-69). In the fifth century BC manner of making the barbarian geography the equivalent of mythical places, Pindar and Euripides transformed this most otherworldly place to an island in the Euxine Sea, where they conveyed both Achilles and his father, Peleus, in their afterlives.¹⁸ It was to similar marginal areas that Iphigenia and Phrixus were transported at the very point of their death. Just as they were being sacrificed, they were both miraculously translated—Iphigenia by Artemis to the land of the Taurians (Eur. *IT* 26-31), Phrixus by an immortal ram to the land of Aeëtes (Eratosth. [*Cat.*] 19). Also the awful sphinx apparently brought her victims to some bright, distant place (Eur. *Phoen.* 807-11). None of these figures who were removed to the world's periphery, were, however, really dead. Not having entered Hades, they would remain in an ambiguous state betwixt and between life and death, a state equivalent to the geography to which they had been transported. The geographical margins in this way offered a possible existence beyond both life and death (*cf.* Endsjø 2001:56-59).

One may argue that these mythical examples have little to do with the real life of the ancient Greeks, but then one forgets how these stories represent the very foundation upon which the various rites of passage were based. The *eschatia* was, for example, the space that offered the adolescents access to adulthood through initiatory ordeals '*onto death*' or '*of which the end may be death*.'¹⁹ Richard Buxton accurately expresses this connection between the prototypical *eschatia* reflected in the

17 Pind. *Pyth.* 4.111-15; *cf.* also Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.247-91.

18 Pind. *Nem.* 4.49-50; Eur. *Andr.* 1259-62.

19 ἐπὶ καὶ θανάτῳ, Pind. *Pyth.* 4.186.

myths and in the ritual context of 'real life': 'Myth translates ritual: to leave one's city is—if you spell it out—to die' (Buxton 1994:153). When asked who were the more numerous, the living or the dead, the legendary sixth century BC Greco-Scythian sage Anacharsis was said to have retorted, 'where do you place those who are sailing the seas?' (Diog. Laërt. 1.104). The tales of actual, historical events could also follow the mythical pattern very closely, as was seen in the case of the fifth century BC Lydian king Croesus. Just as he had climbed upon his own funeral pyre, the king and his daughters were believed to have been snatched away by Apollo and brought to the distant lands of the Hyperboreans (Bacchyl. 3.48-62).

The way the traveller of the *eschatia* was thought to suffer death while still alive, emphasises how the *polis* represented the only space where proper human life was possible. However, by stating that *proper* man was found only in the context of the *polis*, one must at the same time also allow that the *eschatia* reflected a human *potential*. Even though Aristotle may be seen to have exaggerated when he claimed that man without the *polis* was 'either a beast or a god' (Arist. *Pol.* 1253a), the ancient Greeks' view of the peoples surrounding them was that these represented a humanity that had not come to its fruition. This attitude can be seen in the way these peoples often were considered not to have achieved the proper separation from either the sphere of the animals, the gods, or the dead. Accordingly, the inhabitants of the *eschatia* did few or none of the things that were deemed as essential for defining anyone as human—or at least they did not do them properly.

As we recall how life and death were placed on the ancient Greek world map, it is important not to forget the other two stable geographical states on either side of the *eschatia*—the chthonic and the Olympian spheres of the gods. The intermediate state of the ancient rites of passage reflected also a confusion of these two spheres, as can be seen in how, for example, Lucius in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* during his initiation met both chthonic and Olympian divinities (Apul. *Met.* 11.23). The Roman depictions of the Greek Dionysian rites in the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii suggest the same idea, mixing initiates both with Olympian deities and with figures clearly belonging to Hades. The uncannylike madness of the Dionysian mysteries could accordingly be caused just as much by a number of different Olympian gods, as by the dead or some chthonic deity (*cf.* Schlesier 1993:100).

Just as in ritual liminality, it was not only the mixed elements of human being and non-being that faced those travelling in the *eschatia*. There were repeated encounters with divinities belonging to either of those two stable conditions bordering the intermediate territory. This was recognised by Creusa—one of Apollo's many human lovers. Having exposed her infant son in a mountain cave, Creusa spoke of this cave as being both synonymous with Hades as well as a place where Apollo could reach the boy child (Eur. *Ion* 1494-96, 965). The *eschatia* was also the

region where Odysseus spent his time with both Circe and Calypso, and where Hermes and Athena advised him along the way. The heroes at the battlefields just outside the walls of Troy were similarly interrupted repeatedly by the Olympian divinities, while both Hermes and Athena assisted Heracles on his trip to Hades (*Od.* 11.620-26). Apollonius in his Argonautic epic had Jason meet the chthonic goddess Hecate in a field in Colchis (*Ap. Rhod. Argon.* 3.1212-20).

Even more numerous were the many encounters between mortals and immortals taking place in the mountainsides right outside the *polis*. Anchises made love to Aphrodite amid the pines of Mount Ida,²⁰ while Peleus married Thetis on Mount Pelion.²¹ Again, the mythical themes are also reflected in events taking place in historical times. The divine Muses, for example, taught Hesiod on the slopes of Mount Helicon (*Hes. Theog.* 22-23), while in the fifth century BC an Athenian messenger encountered Pan by Mount Parthenium (*Hdt.* 6.105). Pausanias reported that even in the second century AD people could still hear Pan piping on a mountain in Arcadia (*Paus.* 8.36.8).

Living in all respects on the very margins of the human world the peoples of the periphery were again and again said to be closer to the gods. The Ethiopians and the Phaeacians, for example, would both have the gods participate directly at their feasts (*Od.* 1.25-26, 7.200-6), while the Hyperboreans were frequently visited by Apollo (*Pind. Pyth.* 10.34-36).

We must be aware that the gods repeatedly appeared also inside the *polis*, even within the very homes of its citizens. These appearances, however, were restricted either to the context of rites of passage or to times when the structures of the city had been so completely obliterated that the city, in fact, had ceased to exist.²² Otherwise, since the *polis* was the proper realm of the mortals, the gods could come only in the guise of ordinary humans.²³ This differed sharply from how, in the nonsensical and essentially uncivilized *polis* of the distant Phaeacians, the gods always showed themselves in their manifest form (*Od.* 7.200-6).

Reflecting the nature of this confused space, the endless number of nonsensical, reversed or negated situations exemplify how in this realm the elements of non-being encroached upon, intermingled and even merged with the elements of being. This is a precise expression of the liminal condition 'of ambiguity of paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories' (Turner 1967:97). This general

20 *Il.* 2.820-21; *Hymn. Hom. Ven.* 53-291.

21 *Cypria* according to *Schol. Hom. Il.* 17.140.

22 In a number of Euripides' tragedies different gods appeared in their true form as the civic order had been annihilated. Cf. Thetis in *Eur. Andr.* 1231ff, Dionysus in *Eur. Bacch.* 1330ff, the Dioscuri in *Eur. El.* 1224ff, and Apollo in *Or.* 1625ff.

23 Cf. e.g. *Il.* 3.121-22, 3.385-88.

confusion between aspects of being and non-being, chthonic and divine elements experienced by travellers of the liminal space of the *eschatia* accurately reflected the experience of those who ventured into ritual liminality.

As one left the *polis*, the centre of the Greek world, one consequently encountered a complete blur of the distinctions between gods, living men, and the dead. This confusion with its ultimate paradox of simultaneous being and non-being, was also reflected in instances of paradoxical recombinations of human, divine and animal elements, in the context of both spatial and ritual liminality. Parallel to how the space of *polis* represented such an all-encompassing framework that no aspect of civilised society was left unaffected, the *eschatia* was an area with a paradoxical essence that was reflected in the existence of those peoples who permanently inhabited the area. The humanoid Phaeacians and the Cyclopes were, for example, all 'near kin to the gods' (*Od.* 5.35-36, 7.205-6) and even the not so distant Egyptians were to some extent seen as a people directly descended from the gods (*Od.* 4.232). The blameless Ethiopians were also definitively superhuman: after having reached an age of 120 years or more, their dead bodies were free from decay and were kept in transparent coffins among the living (*Hdt.* 3.24). Not properly human, these peoples were free from the mortal restraints of the normal existence of man in the *polis*.

According to both mythical and historical accounts, the *eschatia* was also teaming with all kinds of zoomorphic hybrids like centaurs, satyrs, sirens, and sphinxes. In distant Libya and India men with dog-heads were not uncommon—at least not according to the fifth century BC geographies of Herodotus and Aeschylus.²⁴ All structural restrictions were disregarded in these accounts, just as with the descriptions of the ecstatic maenads who had followed Dionysus out to the mountainsides outside of Thebes, where Euripides described them as suckling fawns and wolf-cubs (*Eur. Bacch.* 699-700). Similar intimate scenes between humans and beasts can be found in the frescos in the Pompeiian Villa of the Mysteries.

Whoever entered the liminal state could never be sure within which category he or she would end up. Accordingly the nuptial rites of passage could not only be characterised by the participators sometimes donning the guise of satyrs, but also by a temporary negation of the categories of gender.²⁵ In the mysteries at the shrine of Lycaean Zeus taking place in an Arcadian cave, the participators risked being turned into wolves (*Pl. Resp.* 565d), not unlike some of the more unfortunate travellers of the *eschatia*. Both Actaeon, Callisto, the hapless comrades of Odysseus, and the Tyrsenian pirates who kidnapped Dionysus, ended up as animals.²⁶ The

24 *Hdt.* 4.191; *Aesch.* according to *Strabo* 1.2.35.

25 *Cf.* Burkert 1985:259; *Plut. Quaest. Graec.* 304cd; *Plut. De mul. vir.* 245ef.

26 *Aesch. PV* 663-76; *Apollod. Bibl.* 3.4.4, 3.8.2; *Od.* 10.234-40; *Hymn. Hom. Dion.* 7.52-53.

Neurian inhabitants of Scythia regularly shifted between being humans and wolves (Hdt. 4.105). The connection between ritual and liminality and the *eschatia* is also still there in these examples of people having their identity altered. Having been transformed into a heifer roaming the periphery, Io was accordingly called a 'maenad of Hera' (Aesch. *Supp.* 562-64). The occasional mortal could on the other hand also be turned into a god in the periphery, as happened to Heracles, Iphigenia, Ino and her son Melicertes, and as was offered as a possibility to Odysseus by Calypso (cf. Endsjø 2001:51-56).²⁷

The ultimate confusion

The confusion found in both the intermediate period of the rites of passage and in the intermediate geography was nevertheless not restricted to a confusion of the characteristics of those who normally inhabited the culturally recognised conditions that limited the *eschatia*. It also implied a confusion of the absolute opposites of being and non-being, which entailed that all aspects of the understood reality were negated, even those of time and space. This, however, is not the same as saying that notions of time and space were not at all present in the ambiguous, liminal sphere, as seems to have been the case in the land of the dead. The years Odysseus spent on Calypso's island were real years, long and enduring, just as ordeals like the straits of Scylla and Charybdis and the Clashing Rocks were nothing but extremely physically tangible. Also the mysteries had defined geographical settings, like Eleusis or Samothrace, and strict timetables as well.

Hades, as the absolute antithesis of *polis* and its proper time and space, was perceived as an area void of both time and space. The liminal state placed betwixt and between those two culturally recognised states would therefore represent that ultimate paradox of simultaneous space *and* non-space, time *and* non-time. Such interstructural confusion with regard to time was manifested in phenomena such as evening touching dawn—as in the land of the Laestrygonians (*Od.* 10.86)—a negation of the very structure that formed time through the division of night and day. On the island of the Phaeacians the cycles that defined the seasonal changes of the year had been eliminated accordingly—a mere look at the gardens of the island would demonstrate this. Different fruits were found to be simultaneously in all stages of ripeness, from merely sprouting to being ready to pick (*Od.* 7.116-26). That Herodotus reported that in Libya summer was eternal was an accurate obser-

27 Heracles became immortal after his body had been burnt on the pyre at the Thracian Mount Oeta (Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.7.7). According to Hesiod (Paus. 1.43.1) and the author of the *Cypria* (Procl. *Chrestomathia* i), Iphigenia was made immortal by Artemis on her transferral to the geographical margins. Ino and her son Melicertes were transformed into the sea deities Leucothea and Palaemon upon throwing themselves into the ocean (*Od.* 5.333-35; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.4.3). For Calypso's offer to Odysseus see *Od.* 7.256-57.

vation, but it nevertheless fitted perfectly with the Greeks' perception of the periphery (Hdt. 2.26). The normal concept of time was similarly confused in the mysteries: Apuleius' Lucius could describe how 'the sun shines brightly about midnight' (Apul. *Met.* 11.23), while Plutarch or Porphyry experienced swift shifts between utter darkness and the brightest of lights during initiation (Stob. 4.52.49).

The sense of space within the liminal state was accordingly just as confused. The huge rocks, which represented an initiatory ordeal for the heroic Argonauts, were, for example said to be 'moving' or 'bewildering'.²⁸ It is also obvious that the original routes of both Argo and Odysseus went far outside any of the Mediterranean itineraries ancient and modern rationalists later have tried to straitjacket them into, far off into nonsensical landscapes that never can be put on any map (cf. Endsjø 1997). As Nanno Marinatos points out, on Circe's island Odysseus and his crew were unable to tell west from east, 'nor where the Sun ... goes under the earth nor where he rises'.²⁹ It was no straightforward landscape either, which the Eleusinian initiate of Plutarch or Porphyry had to navigate through: 'In the beginning there is straying and wandering, the weariness of running this way and that, and nervous journeys through darkness that reach no goal, and possible terror, shivering and trembling and sweating and amazement' (Stob. 4.52.49). Apuleius, in his rendering of later Hellenistic rites could tell about similar experiences, as the initiate was 'ravished through the elements' (Apul. *Met.* 11.23).

The most radical implication of this absence of proper spatial and temporal structures would be that nothing could be distinguished from anything else. The *eschatia* offered accordingly several examples of how everything thus ceaselessly floated together. The *Odyssey*, for example, describes the dramatic land of the Cimmerians at the end of the earth, as a place where darkness was never-ending and everything was eternally 'wrapped in mist and cloud' (*Od.* 11.15-16). This seems to relate to how Hesiod talked of the furthest land beyond Oceanus as either 'dark and concealed,' 'towards Night,' or simply 'cloudy' or 'dim'.³⁰ Aristophanes operated with a landscape of 'darkness and mire' close to the gates of Hades (*Ar. Ran.* 273), while Herodotus, on his part, believed that there were areas in the ultimate north where the air was so full of either snow or feathers that one could neither see nor travel any further (Hdt. 4.31). Similar to these confusing geographies was the realm beyond Heracles' pillars where a dark fog forever cloaked the air and the water. This is, at least, how the fifth century BC Carthaginian explorer Himilco described this region according to the fourth century AD Latin writer Festus Rufus Avienus.³¹ If one travelled far enough, even the water would be so viscous that the

28 *Plankta*, in *Od.* 12.59-72.

29 *Od.* 10.190-92; Marinatos 1995:133.

30 Hes. *Theog.* 334-35, 275, 294, cf. 729-31.

progress of any ship would be impeded—shallows and masses of seaweed would eventually render impossible all movement and thus further indicate the absolute confusion of the elements.³² Apollonius of Rhodes had the Argonauts stranded in a similar astructural landscape which he placed allegorically in ‘the furthest ends of Libya’ (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.81, 4.1227). This confusion is even more obvious in the travel log of the fourth century BC Greek captain Pytheas of Massalia who, on his journey to the world’s edge in the ultimate north, encountered a complete negation of all separate basic entities of the physical world: he was checked by a formless mass comprised of ‘neither earth, nor sea, nor air, but’ at the same time ‘a kind of mixture of these’ (Strabo 2.4.1).

Journeying in a landscape of confusion

As the dimensions of space and time no longer existed in their usual interdependent modes, movement within these areas would accordingly not always be the object by the usual physical laws. Modes of movement that within the walls of *polis* would lead more or less nowhere were again and again the preferred way of travelling in the interstructural *eschatia*: Even though ‘it is difficult even for an active man to reach the peaks of Parnassus . . . , the thyiades’—that is, ecstatic women celebrating the mysteries—‘run raving up there for Dionysus and Apollo’ (Paus. 10.32.5). And as Pindar pointed out: ‘Neither by ship nor by foot can you find the wondrous road to the meeting place of the Hyperboreans’ (Pind. *Pyth.* 10.29-30). According to his own autobiographical poem, Aristeeas of Proconnesus, that legendary seventh century BC figure, still managed to venture this far. But, as we may expect, the way he moves was in no way inconspicuous: inspired by Apollo (*phoibolamptos*) his spirit (*psychê*) left his body for thereupon to fly in the upper airs above all the world.³³ Regardless whether it swam or soared through the air,³⁴ the immortal ram with the golden fleece, which carried Phrixus safely across the seas to the halls of Aeëtes (Eratosth. [*Cat.*]19), was another example of an unlikely

31 Festus Rufus Avienus *Ora Maritima* 386-89. This may sound somewhat removed from a context of ancient Greece, but Avienus presumably based himself on a Greek version of Himilco’s story that probably had more in common with Hellenic presuppositions than with the original secret Carthaginian log: ‘Almost all scholars consider it unlikely that Avienus had direct access to Himilco’s account of the northwestern sea’ (Murphy 1977:29).

32 Festus Rufus Avienus *Ora Maritima* 120-26.

33 Hdt. 4.13; Maximus of Tyre 38.3.

34 Having examined the relevant artistic and literary material, D.S. Robertson (1940:3-4) concludes that the ‘oldest surviving representations of Phrixus on the ram imply swimming. [...] First among the Fliers must be named [Pseudo-]Apollodorus’ (cf. Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.1). That Phrixus and Helle, just as Iphigenia or Croesus, were snatched away from an imminent death, and that the ram was given the siblings by their mother *Nephele* (that is *cloud*; Hesiod according to Eratosth. [*Cat.*]19) may, however, indicate otherwise than Robertson’s conclusion.

means of transport that nevertheless proved to be the most convenient as one travelled the realm of the *eschatia*.

Another sign typical of the liminal traveller was the nonsensical wearing of only one sandal, as if this impediment of movement would enhance one's affinity with the aspect of non-being. Pindar, Pherecydes, and Apollonius of Rhodes, all described how Jason was wearing only one sandal on his return from his early exile in the wild landscapes of his mentor Chiron the centaur.³⁵ This peculiar Cinderella complex is also seen in the case of the sons of Thestius participating in the Calydonian boar hunt,³⁶ while Perseus when he set out on his heroic task to get hold of the gorgon's head, borrowed Hermes' one sandal—something that was going to aid his travelling to the end of the earth.³⁷ Having a foot in some way injured, seems to have carried a similar symbolism to the ancient Greeks: at an initiatory ordeal in the mountainsides of Parnassus the archetypal traveller Odysseus suffered a wound on his leg that later would serve as a mark identifying him (*Od.* 19.392-96). In his second labour of slaying the Hydra, Heracles was accordingly wounded in his foot by a crab sent by Hera (*Apollod. Bibl.* 2.5.2). Also Oedipus who was put out in the *eschatia* and had to return by way of the enigmatic sphinx, was marked by his *one* pierced foot as his name indicates.³⁸

As a number of mythical examples thus tied 'monosandalism' to the oscillation between structured and unstructured spaces, this phenomenon was also connected to the ritual context of the mysteries as depicted on several portrayals of initiates on reliefs and funeral stelae.³⁹ Similar to the Dionysian scenes in the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii (*cf.* Ginzburg 1990, fig. 19), the neophyte at some point in the Eleusinian mysteries placed his left foot on a fleece of Zeus.

Aspects of primordiality

Examining all these amorphous experiences of both ritual and geographical liminality, we are struck by another aspect if we try to perceive this experience from the context of the ancient Greek world view. As everything was confused, it appears as if no separation had ever taken place. This, however, is exactly the point! With its continuous confusion of human, divine and all other elements of the Greek cosmos, the space of the *eschatia* and everything that it enclosed had apparently escaped the primeval separation of the elements into proper categories. While

35 Pind. *Pyth.* 4.75, 4.95-96; Pherecydes according to *Schol. Pind. Pyth.* 4.75 [4.133a]; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.4-11.

36 Euripides according to Macrob. *Sat.* 5.18.17.

37 Artem. *Onirocritica* 4.63. *Cf.* Hdt. 2.91.

38 *Cf.* Soph. *OT* 718-19; Eur. *Phoen.* 26-27.

39 *Cf.* for instance either Esdaile 1909, fig. b-c, Bianchi 1976, fig. 44, or Ginzburg 1990, figs. 16-17.

various aspects of the cosmos once had been sorted out of the original flux, the *eschatia* had remained as something like a primeval rest, forever ambiguous and paradoxical.

Describing this area of confusion as simply ‘the past,’ would, however, be to simplify the matter. The state of the *eschatia* was distinct both from the proper time of the *polis* and the static non-time of Hades. Therefore, to say that the time of the *eschatia* simply reflected the time ‘before’ the time of the proper human life of the city would be contradictory to the very nature of the *eschatia*: the term ‘before’ belonged itself to the temporal categories of the *polis*. In the liminal state of the ancient Greeks the past, the present and the future would all float together—the aspects of time had simply not been structured. The knowledge possessed by the half-dead, interstructurally placed figure of Phineus, was accordingly in no manner limited by the usual temporal and spatial restrictions: His ‘mind’ (*noos*) knew ‘everything’ that had happened in the past and that would take place in the future (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.212).

How the geographical liminality of the ancient Greeks represented a confusion of the past, the present and the future, was also the way the state of the primordial chaos was perceived by the Greeks. As the primordial state was one of total undifferentiation, the proper categories of time had not been defined either. Depictions of the liminal state consequently often contained allusions to the primordial. This, for example, was quite literally the case with the motley ensemble of various creatures following Circe, as described by Apollonius of Rhodes. These figures consisted of limbs apparently so haphazardly assembled that they resembled neither beasts nor humans. The poet himself connected these creatures with autochthonous forms of life that appeared automatically out of the first formless substance—an idea that Apollonius seems to have taken from Empedocles’ theories on the creation.⁴⁰ The amorphous landscapes of Himilco and Pytheas may similarly be associated with the primordial stew Anaximander considered to have preceded everything (Arist. *Ph.* 203a). The *apeiron*, Anaximander’s ‘boundless’ matter, may also linguistically be tied to a term used on the geographical margins. James S. Romm points to how both Homer and Hesiod frequently use the adjective *apeirôn* to describe the ‘boundless’ state of both land and sea outside the *polis*.⁴¹ Moreover, just as these *apeirôn* landscapes of Homer and Hesiod can be considered to have represented something like a primeval leftover, Anaximander thought the primordial *apeiron* lingered on in the periphery, surrounding all the worlds or se-

40 Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.672-81; Aët. 5.19.5. For a more extensive survey of the fragments on Empedocles’ zoogenic theories cf. Kirk, Raven and Schofield 1983:302-5.

41 Cf. Romm 1992:10. *Apeirôn gaia* in *Il.* 7.446; *Od.* 1.98, 5.46, 15.79, 17.386, 19.107; Hes. *Theog.* 187. *Apeirôn pontos* in *Il.* 1.350; Hes. *Theog.* 678. Cf. *Od.* 4.510, 10.195; Hes. *Theog.* 109.

ries of right order (*kosmoi*) (Hippol. *Haer.* 1.6.1-2). Anaximander's *apeiron* encompassed 'the known world in time as well as in space' (Kahn 1960:237). This continuous existence of *to apeiron* is also reflected in how Hesiod's mythical *chaos* 'survived' the act of creation, still existing out there somewhere in the periphery (Hes. *Theog.* 813-14).

This structural identification of the uncivilised geography with the original, primordial flux out of which no autonomous realm ever had been separated, is probably again what was hinted at by Apollonius of Rhodes when, at the moment of the Argo's departure from the *polis*, he had Orpheus singing about 'how the earth, the heaven and the sea once mingled together' (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.496-97). The idea that the inhabitants of the *eschatia*, as previously demonstrated, reflected an unfulfilled human potential, is also an aspect that may be interpreted as an allusion to an earlier stage in human evolution: such an identification was, at least, positively made by Thucydides (Thuc. 1.6). The very absence of the *polis* was in itself a feature typical of the distant past,⁴² just as the lack of proper sacrifice reflected the original state (*cf.* Endsjø 2000)—not only before the schism between man and god,⁴³ but also before the invention of cooking—the art that distinguished man from the wild beasts.⁴⁴ The eating of raw meat was subsequently a custom found both in the rites of the Dionysian mysteries and in numerous societies of the *eschatia*, as the mythical Cyclopes and the non-Greek Eurytanians in Aetolia (Thuc. 3.94).

The ritual imitation of the eschatia

After considering the vast number of ritual, mythical and structural parallels between the two phenomena which I have defined as ritual and geographical liminality, the only major difference we initially were left with was that the intermediate state of rites of passage represented a liminal period of *time*, created ritually, while the *eschatia* constituted a liminal *space*. The many examples of how even the proper notions of time and space are negated, both in the rites of passage and in the *eschatia*, remove even this last difference between the two phenomena as they were perceived by the Greeks.

Were ritual and geographical liminality thus actually one and the same phenomenon? Here, the answer seems to be both yes and no. Regardless whether one entered this liminal state through ritual means, or spatially through going into the *eschatia*, the experience should ideally be the same. The *eschatia*, however, repre-

42 *Il.* 20.216-18; *Hymn. Hom. Vulc.* 3-4; *Pl. Leg.* 677a-81e.

43 Hes. *Theog.* 535-57, *cf.* Vernant 1989:24. Plato wrote more generally of his ancestors living 'nearer the gods' (*Phlb.* 16c).

44 *Ath.* 660e-f; *cf.* Hes. *Op.* 276-78.

sented in all its flux an enduring entity reflecting an actual everlasting primordiality. The liminality of the rites of passage, on the other hand, was in spite of its primordial aspects only a passing moment when the structures of human civilisation were reversed. In this way it is not surprising that there was a clear notion of the various rites of passage actually representing an *imitation* of the geographical state outside of the city. And, as an imitation of these areas, these rites would also frequently involve encounters with the prototypal denizens of the *eschatia*, such as satyrs and sileni, nymphs and pans. One could also, within the setting of the transitional rituals, be transformed into one of these ambiguous creatures,⁴⁵ just as was always the extreme possibility in the *eschatia*.

As the *polis* represented a set of positive structures reflecting the human existence, the state of primordial liminality could be recreated by explicitly bringing in some aspect of absolute negation, symbolically representing either the non-existence of the dead, or the divine elements of either the Olympian or the chthonic gods. Such juxtaposition would automatically negate all given structures, even those of proper time and space. As the liminal state of the transitional rituals thus reflected an imitation of the *eschatia*, the myths accordingly refer to how the various rites had originated in the periphery. The founders of the rites were, for example, repeatedly thought to have journeyed through the landscapes distant from the Greek *polis*. Dionysus and his ecstatic followers travelled through the marginal landscapes of Bactria, Persia and Arabia (Eur. *Bacch.* 13-20), while Persephone, in the myth that rendered the very pattern for the Eleusinian mysteries, was transported over a variety of landscapes, all the way to the land of the dead (*Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 33-37). Apart from such divine origins, the Greeks could at times also consider the mysteries to have originated with the *peoples* who inhabited the distant geography.⁴⁶ Barbarian words were, for example, said to be central components of the secret sayings uttered during the rites (Iambl. *Myst.* 7.4), and non-Greek musical instruments were important elements in the Dionysian mysteries. While the actual historical origin of the Greek rites of passage will probably forever elude us, the way the ancient Greeks themselves considered these rituals to have developed agree completely with van Gennep's view that the physical passage represented the very origin of the various rites of transition (*cf.* van Gennep 1960:22).

The ancient Greek notion of the periphery represented, of course, no objective view of these distant landscapes, but was the result of an extensive cultural process. Leaving his city, the ancient Greek would bring with him a mythical map, a map that would describe the landscape with the nonsensical structures reflecting the liminal state. The subject would thus possess a detailed description of even *un-*

45 Pl. *Leg.* 815c; Strabo 10.3.10.

46 Eur. *Bacch.* 64-67; Diod. Sic. 1.22.23.

known territories long before he would enter it—a map that would present the main categories with which one organised anything one would experience. As the various mythical, historical and geographical sources indicate, there were no clear boundaries between a perceived rational understanding and a perceived mythical understanding of the *eschatia*. The myths rendered in this way the most extreme possibilities, but as the series of historical incidents would demonstrate, the periphery could still be seen as reflecting a primordial existence, and, with this in mind, one could never rule out the chance of neither a hierophantic experience nor a theranthropic transformation.

Living in small communities surrounded by such wondrous and mythical landscapes, why did the Greeks want to imitate this liminal state in their ritual? Despite the conceptions of how the prototypal hero nearly almost would endure some fantastic ordeal every time he ventured into the *eschatia*, most people would neither experience a primordial union with gods when they took a walk in the uncultivated woods, nor would they have their social status permanently altered. We must allow for a certain mythical exaggeration. Whereas the denizen of the *polis* going into the *apolis* in historical times always *could* happen to meet some deity or to be turned into a wolf, such serious consequences were always an *imminent* possibility for the ancient hero of the myths. The ritual context, however, could assure that those who were initiated in some sense would have that experience which the *eschatia* always ought to be reflecting.

Having in this way gone through the extensive parallels between the ancient Greek rites of passage and their view of their own geographical periphery, I have tried to demonstrate how the ritual theories of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner may help us come to terms with the logic of what at first seemed like a very odd suggestion of Heracles. Having defined the *eschatia* as a liminal space not only through its location betwixt and between all stable and culturally recognised geographical conditions of the Greek world view, but also through its intrinsic quality of general confusion, I have argued that behind the intimate ties between this area and the intermediate state of the rites of passage lay a notion of synonymy. Liminal time and liminal space were, in fact, only two facets of the same phenomenon. This is why Heracles could propose to put an end to the Eleusinian rites, recognising that the mysteries were only the human *imitation* of the ideal view of the geographical periphery found not only betwixt and between the city of human life and the land of the dead, but also betwixt and between the Olympian sphere and the chthonic Hades. Having completed that ultimate journey through the *eschatia* all the way to the realm of Persephone, and back, Heracles had indeed ‘experienced far truer mysteries.’⁴⁷

47 An earlier and somewhat shorter version of this paper was printed in *Numen* 47 (2000):351-86.

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Rethinking Sisyphos

Kirsti K. Simonsuuri

THE ANCIENT TALES connected with Sisyphos, a mythical and historical Corinthian king, present factual and interpretative contradictions to a greater degree than is usual in the case of Greek myths. The discussion of the various versions of the mythical tale concerning Sisyphos thus inevitably involves examining some problems of interpretation that illuminate the nature of mythical tales in general. My argument is that, in the myth of Sisyphos, we have an expression of the inseparability of natural and ethical phenomena, that this inseparability exists in most important myths, and that, in the case of the Sisyphos myth, the natural and the ethical worlds are connected in the notion of irreversibility.

I will try to sketch my own position with regard to myth. My interest in myth is of long duration and endurance, and has been rekindled in the activity of writing poetry and fiction. The writer is possibly an enlightened myth-maker in the modern world. Thus telling stories serves, even now, the function of inventing new *mythos* as well as demythologising current beliefs.

Although it is important to remember that mythical tales have their origins in time and place, and are often associated with geographical locations and distinct topographies of a place, purporting to establish the unique historical or chronological identities of places and people, they are also—and for this reason to be distinguished from other kinds of tales—meaningful in widely different locations, situations and times. This is emphasised in Claude Calame's view: 'C'est en effet essentiellement quand disparaît le crédit accordé à leur vraisemblance que les récits semblent devenir des mythes'¹ Thus the historical foundation of mythical tales—which is argued in the Euhemeristic rationalist allegorising—does not have a bearing on them as myths, even though the validity of their verisimilitude might otherwise be accepted. Many myths may be based on a historical fact but that is not the reason why they are myths. Friedrich Prinz has shown in his study (Prinz 1979) that almost every Greek city had its own foundation and succession

1 Calame 1990:18.

myth, that is, a set of tales that functioned as myths, in the life of the community over a long period of time. Thus we expect some degree of symbolic and ritualistic element to operate in tales that we call myths. Myths link two separate worlds together and express this link, which otherwise might not be evident, through symbolic representation.

Mythical tales are mostly transmitted to us in the written form, and, when a sufficient expanse of time has elapsed, in the literary form. Both in myth and in literature, however, there exists a level of meaning which goes beyond the literal meaning. Admittedly myth does not limit its function to literature. Myth is rather a form that exists in the very foundation of culture; and our criticism of culture, our *Kulturwissenschaft* is, in the first place, a criticism of myth. Therefore we can inquire in which particular ways myth, as an archetype of all narration, can explain the social and cultural function of stories and story-telling.

What is interesting from the point of view of this inquiry is the long perspective within which the differences and transformations can be studied—not only with regard to story-telling patterns but also with regard to the various definitions of myth. Even though there may not exist any essential discontinuity between the schemes of meaning in ancient mythologies and their more recent re-enactments, the dimension of continuous interpretation opens up a network of relations that indicate a large element of variability, transactional procedures and contradiction.² When we call myth an inexhaustible symbol we must remember that the inexhaustibility becomes manifest only in reception, in the course of time and interpretation.

Sisyphos is a cultural hero, but also a convict in Hades, an obsessive and heroic labourer, who is, along with the successful adventurer Odysseus, the most European of ancient Greek mythical figures. The compulsion to work is the same as the compulsion to die, to be closer to death, every morning, every time, by commencing a renewed effort. The repetitive pattern is the singular feature in all the tales concerning punishment in the Underworld, but in Sisyphos it is worth special attention. There is an interesting and complex correspondence between the stories before and after dying. The mythical tales concerning Sisyphos while he was alive belong to the oldest layers of Greek mythology. They relate to the foundation of Corinth and its area over a long period of time. Despite the historical basis, there is no original version—although we might speculate about their provenance. The relation to Corinth is a *topos* in itself which already implies interpretation but might help us to explain some specific features of the myth.³

2 Durand 1979, Liszka 1989, McCormack 1976.

3 Bethe 1967, Langridge-Noti 1996, Simonsuuri 1986, 1999.

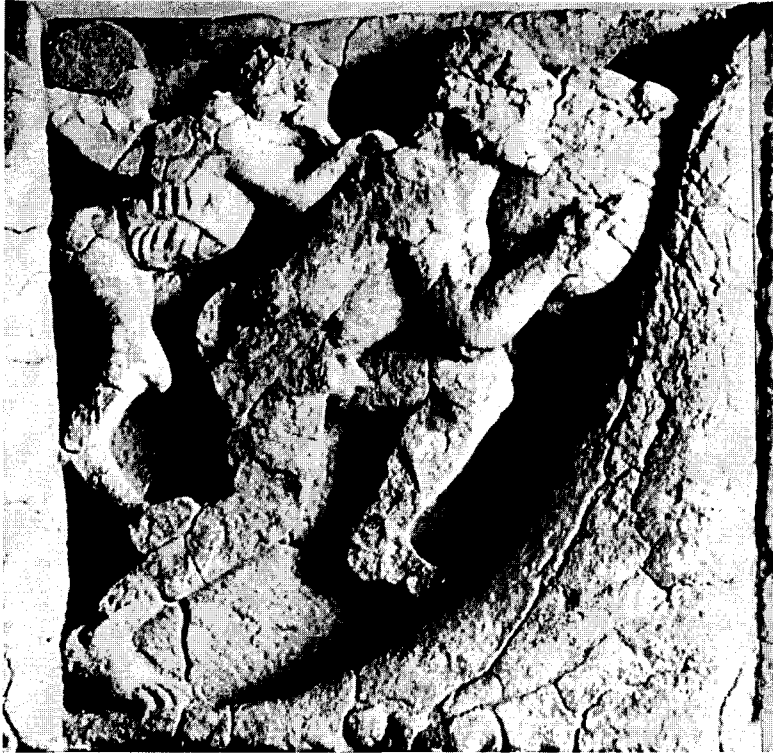


Fig. 1. Sisyphos rolling the stone, with Erinyes (?), the oldest pictorial representation of Sisyphos. Focē de Sele, metope of the Heraion (the Temple of Hera). Ca. 560-550 BC Paestum Museum

The story of the myth of Sisyphos, an Aeolian king, is preserved in its fullest form in the Renaissance mythographer Natalis Comes (*Mythologiae* 1551, 1567), who collects the main variants and tries to tie them together, claiming thus to reveal the ‘occult secrets’ of the tale;⁴ however, his account draws on a great number of ancient sources such as Homer, Apollodorus, Hyginus, Fulgentius, which are various and often contradictory, and, in addition, dating from vastly different periods, from ca. sixth century BC to ca. fifth century AD.

The oldest extant source is Homer, an overwhelmingly important authority in the ancient world. The *Iliad* (*Il.* 6.152-55) mentions Sisyphos of Ephyra (former name of Corinth, or the area in the Argolid), descendant of Aiolos (Αἰολίδης, *Il.* 6.154), the mythical king of the winds whose story is narrated in the *Odyssey* (*Od.* 10.179). He is said to be the father of Glaukos and grandfather of Bellerophon. We thus find Sisyphos in a kind of succession myth, as the *Iliad* associates him with the

4 Conti 1588:lib.1, cap.1. .

heroes of the Trojan war, and gives him the epithet κέρδιστος ἀνδρῶν (*Il.* 6.153), ‘that sharpest of all men’ (tr. Lattimore). Pindar in the 13th *Olympian Ode* also uses myth as history in giving a more profound corroboration for the victory of Xenophon of Corinth: Sisyphos was ὡς θεόν: ‘godlike’ and πυκνότατον παλάμαις: ‘cleverest in crafts’ (*Ol.* 13.53). There are references to Sisyphos’ cunning also in Theognis (Thgn. 702-12) and in a fragment of Hesiod’s *Catalogue of Women* (*Cat.* fr.10.43a.).

Then added to this praise, Sisyphos is also an inhabitant of the Underworld. There is no mention how Sisyphos got there in Homer. The *Odyssey* relates the story of the punishment of Sisyphos in the Nekyia-sequence, in which Odysseus visits the Underworld.⁵ Odysseus sees Sisyphos, ‘suffering strong pains,’ in *Od.* 11.593-600. Homer gives the myth a highly stylised literary treatment. He describes Sisyphos in the company of Orion (*Od.* 11.572-75), Tityos and Tantalos, the legendary offenders in the Underworld, and rather petty criminals, compared to Sisyphos.⁶

The reference to the punishment of Sisyphos in a fragment of Alcaeus (ca. 612-596 BC) is likely to be earlier than the one in the *Odyssey*: in a drinking song Alcaeus mentions Sisyphos, an Aeolian king, having gone to Hades twice, ‘for all his cunning’ (Alc. fr. 38A LP)—in this context a laudation. Pherekydes of Athens, the historian (first half of 5th century BC), gives some reasons for the punishment: first, because Sisyphos revealed to Asopos that Zeus had raped his daughter, Aigina, and secondly, because Sisyphos defeated death twice. When Sisyphos finally died, his punishment was to roll the stone in Hades so that he would not escape again. (*FGrH* 3, fr.119).

It is the passage in the *Odyssey*, admittedly, that has been the focus of attention in the very scarce scholarly literature on Sisyphos. No full-length study exists, and the only two articles devoted to Sisyphos, namely, by Samuel Reinach (1903) and by Christiana Sourvinou-Inwood (1986) are separated by almost a century in time and intention. I shall discuss these later.

In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus encounters three convicts guarded by Minos in Hades: Tityos, Tantalos and Sisyphos. We also know of a lost illustration of this passage by Polygnotos, the wall-painting on the walls of a *lesche* (possibly a club-room) in Delphoi, dating from the 5th century BC, as described in lengthy detail by Pausanias in the 2nd century AD (10.31.10). There, however, only Sisyphos and Tantalos are mentioned. James Frazer in his commentary to Pausanias associates Sisyphos with ‘the legendary history of Corinth,’ with its three distinct strains of

5 The passage is considered a later than early 6th century interpolation. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff’s attribution of it to Orphic sources (1884) has since been rejected: Apthorp 1980.

6 Tityos, present in Homer, is replaced by Ixion, and sometimes the Danaids: Oakley 1995:781-87.

settlers, the Ionians, the Aeolians and the Phoenicians. Sisyphos, son of Aeolus, was a mythical representative of the Aeolians.

Thus it is evident that Corinth, 'Ephyra,' and its location have something to do with the punishment as well. Modern excavations in Corinth by the American School, under the direction of Carl Blegen in the 1930's have confirmed the existence of fortification walls from about 1200 BC, but which were left unfinished at the time when the decisive invasions by the Dorians took place. The excavations (with Pausanias as an initial guide) have also uncovered inscriptions on a piece of marble, bearing the name of Sisyphos, in Greek letters of the Roman period.⁷

The idea of the Acrocorinth is first presented by the French archaeologist Samuel Reinach, in what has remained the only archaeological study of Sisyphos. The article is a highly interesting example of positivist erudition as well as Euhemerism.⁸ Reinach argues that Sisyphos was a real, historical character—as Pausanias tells us—who originated in the Corinthian Isthmus, who was founder of the Isthmian games—as Pausanias also tells—and the master-builder of the Acrocorinth. Therefore, according to Reinach's theory, myths are mutilated history, and Sisyphos in Hades figuratively rolls the colossal stone towards the peak of the Acrocorinth. In this ritualistic theory of myth, the meaning of the Sisyphos myth becomes a representation of the astonishingly difficult task which was attributed to Sisyphos.

But we must investigate further. Reinach's approach to myth presupposes from the outset that a historical base exists; it makes an hypothesis into a fact, and denies, moreover, the essential feature of mythical narratives, that is, their power as symbols and their capacity to generate new meanings in historically unrelated contexts.⁹

II

The idea of the two incompatible orders, the human and the divine, the world of limit and of no limit, are fully explored in the myth of Sisyphos.

Sisyphos is reported (by Apollodorus, Pausanias and Hyginus) to have deserved his punishment of futile toil for having revealed the secrets of the gods and for having outwitted Thanatos by breaking his promise to return to the Underworld. In addition, he challenged natural order by building the Acrocorinth. The crimes of Sisyphos were those of breaking the taboo and involved *hubris*, and the ensuing punishment was the most horrendous, manual labour without result.

7 Blegen 1930:20-28.

8 Reinach 1903.

9 Detienne 1981, Blumenberg 1971, Burkert 1980.



Fig. 2. Sisyphos(?) wearing chitoniskos, chlamys, sandals and pilos, and holding a horn, steps up to lean over a pithos in the ground. Goats on either side. Above Poseidon, Amphitrite, Nereus, Asopos, Hades and Pan. Bell-crater H 5982 by the Meleager painter, ca. 390 BC Martin von Wagner-Museum der Universität Würzburg (Photo: K. Öhrlein, with permission)

However, it must also be seen as reflecting the nature of the crimes. At this point I want to refer to the article by Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, 'Crime and Punishment: Tityos, Tantalos and Sisyphos in *Odyssey* 11' (1987), being the only recent investigation of the theme.¹⁰ Concentrating on the Homeric passage (*Od.* 11.593-600), the article distinguishes the mytheme of Sisyphian cunning vis-à-vis Hades and thus conquering Thanatos. Sourvinou-Inwood analyses the implications of this ruse (*i.e.* of omitting burial) in pre-fifth-century context, thus separating it from the later beliefs concerning a shade or a spirit returning among the living with demands of recompense.¹¹ Thus in her analysis, too, the transgression of the cosmic order is the reason for the punishment. But she focuses only on the violation of the natural law of death and ignores the other aspects of transgression which are equally present in the mythographical tradition and reflect the ensuing

¹⁰ Sourvinou-Inwood 1986, and 1991:16-17.

¹¹ Sourvinou-Inwood 1986:50f.

punishment. She interprets the myth, therefore, as a representation of the movement of ascending to the world of the living and descending to the world of the dead, which is reproduced in the reciprocating, up-and-down motion of Sisyphos' stone.¹² The stone as a headstone maybe? However, this interpretation presents a problem, ingenious though it is. The Homeric passage, as has been pointed out, is an interpolation, maybe an early Hellenistic one, and the symbolic projection cannot be but a partial answer to a genuinely polysemic myth.

The polysemic nature of the Sisyphos myth is attested by the literary tradition. Ancient literature teems with references to Sisyphos; his name is proverbial by early classical times, yielding new word formations, verbs and nouns. Sisyphos is the subject of numerous satyr plays; Aeschylus deals with Sisyphos in the Prometheus cycle. The satyr play *Δραπέτης* (Runaway), deals with Sisyphos escaping Death, and the play *Πετροκυλιστής* (Stone Roller), focuses on Sisyphos's punishment in Hades. Sophocles and Euripides and other playwrights also have written plays on Sisyphos, but all are lost.

What is interesting is the fact that in ancient literature the ambiguity of the character of Sisyphos is often used as a stylistic device. He is both the wise one and the trickster who has conquered Thanatos. No wonder Socrates wanted to see him after his death, as Plato mentions at the end of the *Apology* (41a-42a.), drawing on the various traditions concerning afterlife. In the Homeric conception of the underworld, Odysseus sees only the most famous Greek heroes, Sisyphos among them.¹³ Plato evidently thought that Socrates's death sentence was unjust, and he gave Socrates a chance to remember a proverbial hero, not unlike himself, who had outwitted Thanatos. Sisyphos is thus both the tragic hero and an anti-tragic character, since he overthrows death, and to escape death was considered so unnatural that it was ridiculous. Thus the ritualistic base of tragic feeling inherent to early Greek conceptions of the afterlife was destroyed.

From the fragments of evidence from plays, histories, commentaries we learn the following:

- a) as Sisyphos made known to Asopos that Zeus had carried off and raped the daughter of Asopos, Aigina;
- b) the gods sent Death, Thanatos, to conquer him;
- c) but Sisyphos overcame Death, by tying him, so that men stopped dying, until Ares, the god of war, came to rescue Thanatos;
- d) but as Sisyphos was dying, the second time, he asked his wife Merope to omit his funeral rites so that he was able to persuade Hades, the ruler of the Underworld, to go back to earth;

12 *Ibid.*:52.

13 Brenk 1975, and 1976.

e) when Sisyphos came back to the world of the living, he did not return to Hades until Hermes summoned him and took him down.

In addition, we have the following mythemes:

f) Sisyphos stole the cattle of Autolykos, another master rogue and the grandfather of Odysseus;

g) Sisyphos, and not Laertes, was the father of Odysseus;

h) Sisyphos built fortifications.

The great number of different derivations given for Sisyphos establish the myth as organic and universal from the very earliest times. Still, why such a horrible punishment? We are dealing with the mechanism of personification which also operates in folktales. By the early fourth century, there are two types of qualities associated with Sisyphos. One concerns the ingenuity and benefactions of a cultural hero; the other has to do with his crime and punishment. The parallel myths are, I suggest, Prometheus, Tantalos and Odysseus. Tantalos had to support a stone, a crag of Mount Sipylus, Prometheus was tied to one. The stone is the implement of Sisyphos, the builder, and as it rolls down the completion of the task is forever frustrated.¹⁴ The word used to designate the weight of Sisyphos's stone is κραταιΐς (Hom. *Od.* 11.597), a *hapax legomenon*, but it appears in the *Odyssey* as a proper name for the mighty mother of the sea monster Scylla (Hom. *Od.* 12.124-25) whom Odysseus had to conquer.

The Homeric passage can best be seen within the context of the lengthy string of tales that Odysseus tells to his audience, the Phaeacians. As Segal (1968) and Vidal-Naquet (1983) have pointed out, these sea-faring people, Phaeacians, hold a strategic place between the two worlds of reality and fantasy.¹⁵ The story of the entry to the underworld is, moreover, a portrayal of the religious imagination of the early Greeks. Conceptions about afterlife were less explicit and less uniform than those about gods, and even Thanatos is not a fully developed figure in Homer.¹⁶ Yet, Homer emphasises the geography of Death, by describing the location of literal recompense—reward or punishment—and how to get there: by telling a story.

The story to be told, like the others connected with the Sisyphian cycle, has a philosophical as well as a fantastical content. Within the poetic space that reveals the myth of the human condition even in antiquity, the narrative offers a wide range of interpretation. In this story, the afterlife in Hades is presented as a

14 The Homeric motifs are found in folktales from all parts of the world, namely 1) unremitting torture as punishment, 2) revealing the secrets of a god, 3) magic object keeps falling down, Stith Thompson: *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*. Copenhagen 1957, Sisyphos: C420; C51.4; D1649.1; Q500-01.

15 Segal 1968:321-42; Vidal-Naquet 1983:46f.

16 Vermeule 1979:36.

straightforward, logical continuation of life on earth. There is an eyewitness, Odysseus, who observes the gruesome details without any moral comment and as if reporting a well-known tale. Although the reasons for the punishment of Sisyphos are not mentioned in the passage of the *Odyssey*, the punishment confirms its foundation in the total religious system of archaic Greece. As Persephone is childless, sterile, so the life in Hades is vain, without substance.

In Hellenistic and Roman literature, the religious and ritual base of the Sisyphos myth grows less significant but we still have the basic elements of the story. The symbolism of Sisyphos' crime and punishment becomes explicit for the first time in Lucretius. The passage (3.998-1000) reads as follows:

*nam petere imperium quod inanest nec datur umquam
atque in eo semper durum sufferre laborem,
hoc est adverso nixantem trudere monte
saxum ...*

Lucretius, in line with the allegorical interpretative tradition, decodes the moral content, which he then presents as the real meaning of the myth. The stone and the mountain top have a negative signification, they represent the futility of human effort. The banality of the desire that is never satisfied is emphasised rather than *pot-hos*, transcendence of desire. In Dante, too (*Inferno* 7.25-35) the crime and its punishment are equally banal. The idea that such an existence is vain, pointless, that Sisyphos is an 'imago hominis mundani' (Jacobus Masenius, 1650) will remain the standard interpretation of the myth of Sisyphos in the Renaissance and Baroque literatures, in Boccaccio, Ronsard, Opitz, Gryphius, and through the eighteenth century. Life and death are linked in continuity.

III

At what point did the tale become a myth, a mythical tale? We can observe some of its most frequent versions, the repetitions and the variations that have developed around the individual mythemes. That the myth tells, very early on, about techniques of dealing with desire, involving frustration, imperfection and achievement, seems to me to be a plausible frame of interpretation, and is confirmed by the fact that it is related to the sea-faring people, the Corinthians (Ephyreans) and to their efforts to conquer the primal forces of nature.

The connection with the myth of Aiolos is also significant (Hom. *Od.* 10.1-79) as the Aiolos cycle refers to the various techniques of magic and skill known to seafarers who combat nature for their living and, as the name of Aiolos emphasises, the mutability of winds and fortunes.

Moreover, in the context of Corinth, the element of water and its mastery intervenes in strategical points. Corinth is a double sea town, on an isthmus between the Saronic Gulf and the Corinthian Gulf—it borders on the Argolid, Boeotia, and

Phokis. The river god Asopos dedicates a spring to Sisyphos, in gratitude for his revelation concerning divine misdemeanours; the spring is named Peirene by Pausanias, but its mythical location seemed to have been much higher up than the present one in the centre of the city. Ino, who became associated with Sisyphos by marrying Athamas, his brother, was transformed into a marine divinity together with her son Melikertes, whom Sisyphos buried and honoured by founding the Isthmian games. The wife of Sisyphos was Merope, a Pleiad, thus being associated with the rainy season and the beginning of the sailing season as the constellation of the Pleiads rose. Within this context, too, the punishment of Sisyphos in dusty hell shows the story-teller's perfect sense of irony.

In the Homeric narrative, the myth of Aiolos operates on a level that also relates it to the individual psyche and its temperamental variability in the face of the unknown. The individual (internal) and the cosmological (external) levels are perfectly blended in the myth of Aiolos; and although the Homeric account of Sisyphos is very much shorter, it crystallises in a similar way the individual (internal) and the cultural (external) essence of a polysemic myth. The two myths therefore narrate, in a broad manner, the transition from nature to culture, from magic to science.

In the modern world imbued with technology, when all implements and objects for achieving certain ends become invested with special powers, the frustration of these ends, often material and sexual in nature, becomes similarly magnified, blown out of proportion. Jean Brun has claimed that Sisyphos is condemned to roll the stone, which is nothing other than himself.¹⁷ In the psychoanalytic interpretations—which to my mind go back to the allegorico-ethical interpretations practised by the Stoics—this notion is taken for granted.¹⁸

The modern conflict between experience of infinity and of limit and imperfection has been expressed in the art of Wolfgang Mattheuer (1970-1975), Rudolf Hoflehner (1966), Enzo Cucchi (1980-82) and Olaf Christiansen (1964), who have used the Sisyphos theme. The myth had an appeal for Marx, who frequently refers to 'Sisyphusarbeit der Akkumulation' when talking about Austrian economy or the Franco-German wars. Sisyphos again becomes a cultural hero. Marx's Sisyphos-worker submerged by the capitalist means of production is a cultural hero type; and so is the Nietzschean liberator of men from collective madness, the Sisyphos of the German writer Georg Strähler. Heiner Müller, in *Traktor* (1955/61, performed 1974) reverses the heroic cycle—his 'Traktoristin' is engaged in a meaningless activity. In the DDR the historical notion of continuously productive labour

17 Brun 1981.

18 Bunker 1953, Caldwell 1990.

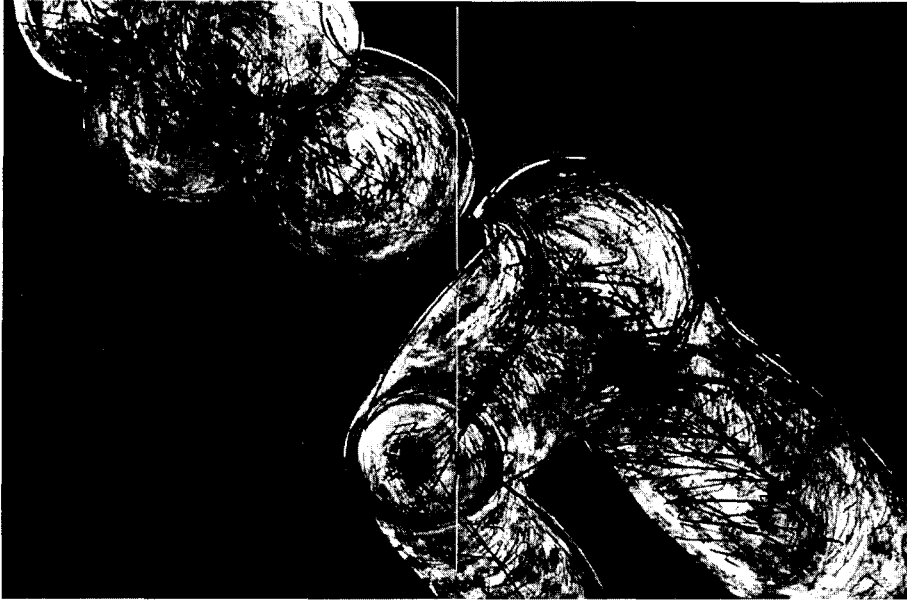


Fig. 3. Rudolf Hoflehner, 'Sisyphos kämpft,' in *Sisyphos-Hommage à Albert Camus*. Stuttgart 1966 (with permission)

being the key to human self-realisation was frequently illustrated (and used by artists with veiled irony) by the figure of Sisyphos.¹⁹

Camus, turning back to Homer and sweeping away centuries of interpretation and mythographical arachnomachy, defines a new heroic concept that is both universal and strictly bound to its time. For Camus, as for many existentialist poets and philosophers in France, Sisyphos is a symbol of the tormented, creative man. Camus' interpretation in *Le Mythe de Sisyphos* (1942), of which the titular short essay is one part, fully illustrates the existentialist principle that man has a capacity and responsibility to create his own world, and therefore that human existence is nothing other than this permanent creation where death and anguish form inseparable experiences.²⁰

Camus' idea that Sisyphos is a tragic hero, because he is aware ('conscient') of his situation relates his interpretation to the versions in early Greek literature where the knowledge and intelligence of Sisyphos were held in esteem. But Camus further emphasises that the only possible life is the conscious life of revolt, the ab-

19 Bernhardt 1983.

20 Camus 1981, Butor 1968.

surd life. The revolt lodges in a series of repetitive actions, a series of present moments which are linked together in a chain of similar situations.

The absurd is the choice where there is no choice. It is illustrated in the lives of four human types: Don Juan, the Actor, the Conqueror, and the Artist. Sisyphos is the one myth represented in ancient Greek thought which encompasses all these types. Camus therefore sees Sisyphos as a kind of prefiguration of the absurd hero, of the 'sensibilité absurde' which he studied also in *L'Étranger* (1941).

Camus' interpretation of the myth of Sisyphos is illuminating in the way it demonstrates the efficacy of misreading and the value of misreading for the survival of myths. Although the tragic hero works within the limits of time and space he can, according to Camus, both overcome and glorify the absurdity of his existence through voluntary and persistent effort. The conclusion steers away even more significantly from the matrix of ancient thought: 'La lutte elle-même vers les sommets suffit à remplir un cœur d'homme. Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux' (1981). This idea would have been inconceivable in the ancient world where the notion of retribution was inseparable from the conception of the tragic. It would have been inconceivable also from the point of view of the mythographical tradition, where Sisyphos represented a human being incapable of 'bonheur' or 'tranquillité.' We have here more than a new reading of a myth; it is, conclusively, an addition, a modern myth.

A historical moment and a cultural situation can thus redistribute the mythical content in novel ways. Myth appears to be a type of narrative that touches on several, not just one, of the contents of a given experience—individual, cultural, social, historical and cosmological. Given the differences between written and oral myths, any attempt to explain them through a reductionist, single frame of reference is doomed to failure. However, singular, imaginative interpretations may reveal certain specific aspects of myth, which even the most minute historical analysis may fail to capture, and thus help us to understand myth's complex theory of origins. As we go back to modern works, we should remember that the ancient myth was maybe in its conception a modern text once, a fragment of a story that was never completed.

Some final remarks. Within the value system of early Greek civilisation, it is highly probable that the type of the Sisyphos tale would end with the punishment of the hero. The same type is portrayed in the myths of Tantalos and Prometheus. The myth of Oidipous also ends with the destruction of the hero (his blindness), but finally the gods absolve him. His quest was for the knowledge that relates to power (to his identity) and he was granted that knowledge. In terms of the final end to the succession myth, however, the myth ends not only in blindness but in the total annihilation of his line.

The structure of the Sisyphos tale indicates that the protagonist suffered a similar fate. Sisyphos' quest was for the knowledge that relates to freedom, and more specifically to the freedom to reverse the natural order, to transgress the limits, and he was granted that knowledge—however, his story ended in the city of dust, in Hades.

There seem to be cognitive functions in myths, even though it may not be evident at first, as the cognition is buried under the disguise of metaphoric and polysemic language (as in poetry), as well as fragmentation of meaning in referentiality and intertextuality. Allusion and intertextuality are powerful mechanisms of literary tradition, and may in part obscure—and have obscured—from us the more fundamental nature of myths. Tradition can carry plenty that is simply false, and there is such a mechanism as a respect for tradition, too, that distorts the understanding of myths, and renders them into empty symbols.

But myths exist also as concretisations, not only as allusions. It is precisely because of their power to act as charts of thought that Greek myths have repeatedly been under attack in theological, ideological and philosophical controversies throughout the centuries. Thus we have in myth a verbal form that transgresses the notion of literature, a verbal form that is like a ritual and like a poetic text but is neither. What it resembles most closely, is a kind of code that acts as an instrument of self-understanding in culture.

In both archaic and modern societies, to the extent that myths are believed, they can be dangerous symbols which have the capacity of putting cultural values and cultural rules in jeopardy—since they also have the function of maintaining those values, rather in the way taboos do, dealing with the dangerous ground between human and divine.

With regard to the Sisyphos myth, it is interesting to observe, however, in what ways the patterns of interpretation remain constant even in widely different cultures and in different times. It seems that myth is not so much universal, as it is a symbol or a sign that can provide a unity of thought through centuries, manifesting its non-historical character in new historical contexts.

If, however, we want to presuppose that there is such a thing as an original myth, we would encounter difficulties. The great variability of local conditions, incidental occurrences, conscious elaboration, *i.e.* individual contribution, and a particular cultural framework, *i.e.* social contribution, would amount to such a mass of unpredictable features that it would be useless to deduce the original myth from them. We could, instead, think of 'mythical thinking,' recalling Lévi-Strauss' famous formula. Similarities in the myths of geographically and chronologically distant cultures could be seen, rather, as an indication of the fact that the number of stories is not that great. This is, paradoxically, an exciting prospect for creative

arts. Instead of looking into the origin of a myth, we might, as it were, look into myths that are perpetually in their origin.

The most judicious way therefore is to interpret the series of mythical tales that deal with the character of Sisyphos as a group of stories emphasising the fragility of human desire and the philosophical notion of irreversibility. They attempt to redefine such concepts both in the natural world with its natural laws of dying and in the ethical questions that have to do with human existence. This is in no way in conflict with the fact that the name is closely associated with the sea-faring Corinthians and their complex population history going back to Neolithic and early Helladic times.

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Syloson's cloak and other Greek myths

Jesper Svenbro

1. Introduction

THE TITLE of this paper, 'Syloson's cloak and other Greek myths,' may seem intriguing, as Syloson is not a god nor a hero in what we normally refer to as Greek myth, but the brother of the tyrant Polykrates, who ruled over the island of Samos in the sixth century BC. An historical figure, then, rather than a mythical one (even if he should prove identical with the fox in Aesop's fable, or *muthos*, 'The lion, the ass, and the fox').¹ However, I will discuss the story of his cloak only after a number of considerations, starting with a brief reexamination of the theory of myth proposed fifty years ago by Louis Gernet. To put it more precisely: what I will discuss is an aspect of myth that I have been exploring for a couple of years together with my colleague John Scheid during our joint seminars at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris (Scheid 1995:274-76, Scheid 1996:311-18).² When working on various problems related to myth and mythical thought, we discovered that some rather specific principles of ours had in fact already been discretely formulated by Louis Gernet and Jean-Pierre Vernant. This is why I will start with presenting these principles—before proceeding to a couple of representative shorthand analyses, the first of which deals with the name of Orpheus, the second with Syloson's cloak.

2. The agalma and the mythical story according to Gernet

In his article on the 'mythical notion of value' in ancient Greece, Louis Gernet analyses a series of mythical stories which have one common denominator (Gernet 1948): they are all focused on 'objects of value' or, more precisely, on the objects that the Greeks called *agalмата*, *i.e.* objects that constitute a 'source of joy' for the giver and the receiver, if we stick to the etymology of the word. For the word *agalma*, plural *agalмата*, is a noun derived from the verb *agallesthai*, 'take a joyous

1 Aesop *Fable* 209 Chambry; *cf.* Hdt. 3.39 for the historical scenario. *Cf.* also *Fable* 228 Chambry, which seems to be the fabulist's version of the story told in Hdt. 3.142-43.

2 *Cf.* also Vernant 1996:40.

pride in something' (Chantraine 1968:6-7, Gernet 1948:97-98). To anyone who studies pre-monetary value and the status of objects in archaic Greece, Gernet's article on the *agalmata* is a precious take-off point.

But the importance of this article is not only to be found on the level of objects and pre-monetary value. Published in the *Journal de Psychologie*, Gernet's article has a theoretical dimension, anticipating, already in 1948, the transformation in the study of myth that was going to characterise the following decades, notably in the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose article 'The structural study of myth' was originally published, in English, a couple of years later (Lévi-Strauss 1955).³ Quoting Ferdinand de Saussure, back in 1948, Gernet sets out to consider mythology as 'a kind of language,' *une espèce de langage* (Gernet 1948:100; cf. di Donato 1983:337-38).

Even if Gernet's perspective at first sight seems close to the Lévi-Straussian one, we should not exaggerate the resemblance. Gernet simply never developed his linguistic intuition on a large scale. And what interests me in his approach is not the prophetic proposition I just quoted. I am concerned with another aspect of it, which I call the 'generative' aspect. In Lévi-Strauss' analysis, as the reader may recall, the Oedipus story is the narrative answer to a fundamental contradiction in Greek culture between the belief in the autochthonous origin of man and the fact that human beings are born from the union of woman and man (Lévi-Strauss 1958:239). The story is the answer to a logical impossibility, from which it is generated. Now, the way in which Gernet analyses mythical stories focused on *agalmata* also has a 'generative' aspect. But whereas myth to Lévi-Strauss is the story by which a logical difficulty is overcome, Gernet seems to consider a myth as a material object generating stories. As if the myth were an object rather than a story.

In the study of ancient Greek and Roman 'myths of weaving and fabric' that John Scheid and myself have been carrying out—the results have been published under the title *Le métier de Zeus* a couple of years ago—we soon reached a point where we had to ask ourselves precisely whether myth, understood as a story, is not an obstacle to the analysis of the mythology of weaving. Would it not be an advantage to define myth as a non-narrative phenomenon (Scheid and Svenbro 1994:10-11 [with n. 8-9], 1996:3 [with n. 7-8])? This was the question we were asking when we came back to Gernet's article. Let me quote a passage from our introduction:

'The difficulties encountered by mythology (in the usual sense of the word), iconology, and the study of rituals, when each, for the needs of its own interpretative work, makes use of the other two, are well known. These problems result in part from the fact that none of the three can claim a privileged position with respect to the other two: the story does not automatically hold

3 Lévi-Strauss' own translation of this article, 'La structure des mythes,' appears as chapter xi in Lévi-Strauss 1958:227-55.

the key to the image or the ritual, for example. Whether we are dealing with stories, images, or rituals, specific rules correspond to each field, requiring more cautious methods on the part of the scholar than mere juxtaposition or naive identification.

Moreover, mythology (still in the usual sense of the word) cannot be confined to the domain of stories: the pieces of information it employs in its analyses come from sources that are too varied to permit us to subscribe to an absolute hegemony of the narrative.

In reflecting upon these difficulties we came to consider the myth not as a story but as a simple linking or concatenation of categories, linking thanks to which it becomes possible, within a given culture, to engender mythical stories, images, and rituals. Thus envisioned, the now-equal relationship among story, image, and ritual is one not of mirroring but of common descent, giving the respective documents an air of close parentage, the origin of which would be this linking of categories we call myth. In a given culture, this myth tends to remain relatively stable, and this stability is particularly evident when it is linguistic in nature' (Scheid and Svenbro 1996:2-3).

It was when we arrived at this point that we realised how close our perspective was to Gernet's (this would not surprise outsiders who know that we are both members of the Centre Louis Gernet, but it did surprise us at the time). As a matter of fact, as he sets out to study the tradition on Eriphyle's necklace, Gernet talks about the 'points of contact' where 'connections regarding the object of value appear [in the narrative imagination that it sets in motion].'⁴ To put it in a different way, the associations characterising Eriphyle's necklace in Greek tradition are due to the capacity of this *agalma* to generate stories. The center of gravity in the story is the necklace, embodying a series of meanings that 'the narrative imagination will set in motion.' The story may in fact be seen as generated by the object, triggering, as it were, its own exegesis in the form of narrative.

3. *The name of Oedipus in Vernant's analyses*

A return to Gernet, then. But not only to him. Rereading Vernant's seminal article from 1970, 'Ambiguity and reversal: on the enigmatic structure of *Oedipus Rex*' (Vernant 1970),⁵ I was struck by the following passage:

'Even the name of Oedipus lends itself to such effects of reversal. In its ambiguity, it is stamped with the enigmatic character that is the mark of the entire tragedy. Oedipus is the man with the swollen foot (*oidos*), an infirmity that recalls the accursed child rejected by its parents and exposed to savage nature to die. But Oedipus is also the man who knows (*oida*) the riddle

4 The American translation (Gernet 1991:81) has curiously left out the most important part of the sentence: 'dans l'imagination légendaire à laquelle il donne le branle' (Gernet 1968:104).

5 Available in Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1972:99-131, 1988:113-40.

of the foot *The whole of the tragedy of Oedipus seems to be contained in the play to which the riddle of his name lends itself.*⁶

Let me cut my quotation there. For if this is the case, *i.e.* if the name *Oidipous* 'contains' the whole tragedy of its bearer, are we to believe that Sophocles and his predecessors discovered this state of affairs retrospectively? Shouldn't we rather think that the name has been there at the outset, guiding the construction of the Oedipus story? Is it not necessary, even urgent, to consider the name as prior to the successive elaborations of the story?⁷

A second article completes 'Ambiguity and reversal' that I just quoted, namely 'The lame tyrant: from Oedipus to Periander,' first published in 1981 (Vernant 1981:235-55).⁸ Here, the starting point is the analysis of the Oedipus myth proposed by Lévi-Strauss in 'The structural study of myth' from the mid-fifties, which I have already quoted and which is included in *Anthropologie structurale* (Lévi-Strauss 1958). If Vernant does not mention this article at all in 'Ambiguity and reversal,' he highlights it in 'The lame tyrant,' even if he is cautious to underline its ambiguous character: the article is inaccurate in the eyes of the specialists, he says, but it brought about a profound change in the study of myth. But in fact, Vernant is not interested in the inadequacy of Lévi-Strauss' Oedipus analysis nor in its importance on the methodological or theoretical level. He is only interested in one aspect of this analysis: 'So far as I know,' he writes, 'Lévi-Strauss is the first to have noticed the importance of a characteristic feature of all three generations of the Labdacid lineage: a lopsided gait, a lack of symmetry between the two sides of the body, a defect in one foot' (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1986:45, 1988:207). Coming from the field of Amerindian mythology, Lévi-Strauss saw the 'lopsided gait,' or limping, as expressing the notion of autochthony (Lévi-Strauss 1958:238-39), but Vernant denied that the Greeks ever associated limping with autochthony: in Greek mythology, men born from the earth never show a defective foot or an anomaly in the manner of locomotion.⁹

What is the symbolical signification, then, of limping to the ancient Greeks? In other words, we should ask ourselves if limping may take on a metaphorical meaning in ancient Greece. As Vernant convincingly shows, this is actually the case.¹⁰ In ancient Greece, limping appears as a metaphorical way of expressing the fact that something is wrong in the relation between generations, or in the ancestry. If I am

6 Vernant & Vidal-Naquet 1988:123-24 (my italics).

7 Inversely, Nagy 1979:70-71 considers the mythical theme of Achilles as prior to the crystallization of the name **Achi-lauos*, taken to mean 'whose *host* of fighting men has *grief*.'

8 Reprinted in Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1986:45-69, 1988:207-27.

9 Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1986:46, 1988:207-208.

10 Two texts quoted by Vernant are decisive: Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.1-3; Plut. *Ages.* 3.1-9.

not mistaken, no Greek hero succeeds in disturbing the normal succession of generations better than Oedipus, whose name in this way becomes almost too appropriate.

Thus, from Vernant's article 'Ambiguity and reversal,' I would like to single out the 'generative' perspective; and from 'The lame tyrant,' the discovery of the symbolical association between limping and genealogical disorder. This association or, to stick to my formula, this 'concatenation of categories,' is in my perspective the myth itself, understood as the matrix, or nucleus, of the story. 'Limping is genealogical disorder' would thus be the 'proposition' or *muthos* from which the Oedipus story is generated.¹¹

4. *The name of Orpheus*

Is it possible to consider the name of Oedipus as an isolated case? Certainly not. I could quote other proper names of the same kind, e.g. the one of Aesop, the fabulist. According to tradition, Aesop was dumb till he reached adulthood. He is then thought to have received the gift of speech from Apollo and the Muses (*Vit. Aesop.* G 7 Perry). In fact, one may suppose that the name of Aesop, Αἴσωπος in Greek, refers precisely to this 'gift of speech.' Or, to put it in another way: one may suppose that this 'significant name' has provided the germ of the tradition on Aesop's aphasia and its curing: the name seems to be a compound of αἶσα, 'portion, part, lot,' and ὄψ, genitive ὀπός, meaning 'voice' (with the contraction of α and ο into ω). At the same time, Aesop is evidently the person who endows animals with the power of speech, which may be seen as a second exegesis of the same name *Aisopos*.

But in this paper it is not the name of Aesop—nor those of Ajax or the princess Phoinike nor that of a late-comer like Ovid's Vertumnus¹²—but the name of Orpheus that I would like to examine more closely, and precisely in a 'generative' perspective.

What is it that the name *Orpheus* suggests to the Greek ear? In the immediate neighbourhood of it, we find the name of a fish, the 'grouper' (or the 'sea-perch,' as the Loeb translators have it)—*Serranus gigas* is its scientific name—, called *orphos* in Greek, or even *orpheus* (given that the plural ὀρφέες = ὀρφεῖς is attested).¹³ Modern Greek still uses this term, with or without an inversion or metathesis of

11 Cf. Barthes 1957:215.

12 For Ajax, see Scheid 1998:296; for Phoinike and Vertumnus, see Scheid 1996:312-16. The presence of Vertumnus here should be taken to indicate that there is no specific mythopoetic age producing once and for all the stories that subsequent generations of Greeks have simply repeated.

13 See *LSJ* s.v. ὀρφεύς. The formal (dialectal) diversity of this fish-name (along with ὀρφεύς, one finds ὀρφός, ὄρφος, ὀρφός and ὀρφῶς) seems to indicate that it is not a learned term inspired by the proper name Ὀρφεύς.

the first syllable: *rophos* or *orphos*. In Turkish it is called *orphoz*. In French, *mérou* (Davidson 1972:80). Between Ὀρφεύς and ὀρφός, the distance is the same as between e.g. Achilles' father Πηλεΰς and πηλός, between 'Mud-man'¹⁴ and 'mud.' The association between Orpheus and the grouper is even made explicit in a comedy by Alexis, the *Crateias*, quoted by Athenaeus: 'And Callimedon-the-Crayfish came along with Orpheus-the-Grouper' (Ath. 8.340c).

At first, one may think that this is nothing but the pun of a comic poet, without any consequences for our understanding of the Orpheus figure. But let us not be too sure. Actually, I think that it is in our best interest to pay attention to the characteristics of the fish in question. Athenaeus has a whole little article under the entry *orphos* (7.315a-c), from which I would like to quote a few lines:

'The *orphos* ... is ... solitary as well. A peculiarity of the fish is that no seminal ducts are found in it, and it stays alive a long time after its dissection. It belongs to the class of animals which hibernate during the most wintry days Dorion says that the young *orphos* is by some called *orphakine*.'

This passage needs a short commentary. First we may note that the grouper (1) 'stays alive a long time after its dissection, *anatome*.' The same observation is made by two other ancient writers, namely Aelian and Oppian. In Aelian we find the following passage: 'The *orphos* is a marine creature, and if you were to catch and cut it up, *anateinois*, you would not then and there see it dead, but it retains the power of movement, and for a considerable time' (Ael. NA 5.18). Oppian also mentions 'the race of the late-dying *orphoi*, which of all others on the earth remain longest alive and wriggle even when cut in pieces, *tmethentes*, with a knife' (Opp. H. 1.142-44).

The importance of this characteristic is easily understood: like Orpheus, the grouper lives a long time after having been reduced to pieces. If the fish called *orphos* is related to Orpheus, it is not only because of the lexical proximity (or identity) of *Orpheus* and *orphos* (or *orpheus*), but also because the singer and the fish both live long after their 'dissection.' To this we should add the fact that the singing head of Orpheus travels over the sea, as if to underline the resemblance even further.

Once we realise the relation between Orpheus and the grouper, even the fact that the fish is 'solitary,' *moneres*, becomes significant (2): it is with the adjective *solus* that Virgil's classical version of the Orpheus legend in the *Georgics* characterises the singer after his return from the Netherworld (Verg. G. 4.517).¹⁵ One may also note Virgil's expression *solo in litore*, 'on the lonely beach,' before the descent (Verg. G. 4.465).

14 *Batr.* 19; cf. 206. For the suffix change, cf. *Bakchos/Bakcheus*, *Neilos/Neileus* and, more particularly, *oinos/Oineus*, 'wine'/'Wine-man.'

15 Cf. below p. 283 with n. 21.

The third characteristic of the grouper is the fact that (3) 'it belongs to the class of animals which hibernate.' The fact is equally attested in Aristotle (*Arist. Hist. an.* 8.15.599b2-6), as well as in Aelian: 'All through the winter it likes to remain at home in its caverns, *en tois pholeois*, and its favourite resorts are near land' (*Ael. NA* 5.18). If the grouper hibernates, this only underlines one important aspect of Orpheus' visit to the Netherworld. In this context, we may consider the fact that it is the tortoise that provides the sound-box of the lyre, which is a specifically Orphic instrument, without which, according to Varro, it is impossible to make the souls ascend from the Netherworld:¹⁶ exactly like the grouper, the tortoise hibernates, *pholeuei* in Greek (*Arist. Hist. an.* 8.15.599a30-33; *cf. Parv. nat.* 475b22-23), and the descent to the Netherworld may actually be considered as a kind of hibernation.

The fourth detail to be taken into account is contained in the following phrase: (4) 'Dorion says that the young *orphos* is by some called *orphakine*.' In other words, the young grouper has a feminine name, *orphakine*, derived from the masculine noun *orphos* (as *delphakine* is derived from *delphax* or **delphos*, 'pig').¹⁷ If I insist on the question of gender here, it is because the grouper is a transsexual fish. Let me quote an article by a French specialist, Roger Cans:

'At some point between the age of nine and sixteen-seventeen, the female grouper becomes male. All older groupers—the fish may attain the age of fifty—are males, who live as hermits deep down in their caverns, which they only leave for a couple of hours during the day in order to eat' (*Le Monde*, January 31, 1990).'

I believe that the term *orphakine* could indicate that the ancients knew that the grouper is born female and turns male only later. For according to Dorion, it is precisely the 'young *orphos*' that is called *orphakine*. And this is probably the context in which we should consider another of Athenaeus' affirmations: (5) 'A peculiarity of the fish is that no seminal ducts are found in it.'

If we are to believe the pattern suggested by marine zoology, Orpheus did not mourn his wife Eurydike—whose pre-Virgilian name is *Agriope* (*Hermesian. fr.* 7.2 Powell = *Ath.* 13.597b)¹⁸—but the young girl he was before becoming Or-

16 For the fragment of Varro, preserved in a scholium to *Verg. Aen.* 6.119, see Nock 1927; *cf.* West 1983:30.

17 I follow the Loeb translator, C.B. Gulick, who makes the accusative ὄρφακίην in our text depend on a feminine nominative ὄρφακίη, although it is possible to make it depend on a masculine nominative ὄρφακίης (preferred by the Liddell-Scott-Jones; but one would have expected *ὄρφακίως in analogy with masculine κορακίως, 'young raven'). Unfortunately neither nominative is attested. For δέλφαξ, see *e.g.* Epicharm. fr. 100.4 Kaibel (masc.); for δελφακίη, *ibid.* 124.2 (fem.). For the hypothetical form *δέλφος, see Chantraine 1968:260-61, *s.v.* δέλφαξ.

18 See Svenbro 1992:150 with n. 72.

pheus. That is: he mourned himself. This mourning seems to belong to a stage in the development of the Orpheus figure of which we do not, to my knowledge, have any other traces.

But a parallel story immediately presents itself to one's mind: the one about Narkissos. According to Pausanias, the famous story of the young man who fell in love with himself had a less 'absurd' version than the one generally associated with the name of the hero (Paus. 9.31.7-9).¹⁹ According to this version, Narkissos had a twin sister who looked exactly like himself. He fell in love with his sister, and when she died, Narkissos went to the spring to seek consolation by looking at his own image in the water—not because he was in love with himself but because his image bore perfect resemblance with his dead sister. If we assume that the current version of the Narkissos story is prior to the one told by Pausanias, this means that its development is a perfect parallel to the development I assume for the Orpheus story. In both cases, the 'self' of the hero is replaced by his 'other.' But whereas Eurydike became a figure of primary importance, Narkissos' twin sister did not have the same success: in the classical (Ovidian) version of the story, it is the self of the hero that is the object of his love, not his dead twin sister. Inversely, in the classical (Virgilian) version, Orpheus loves his dead wife, not his own self.

I should add that Greek popular etymology associated the name Νάρκισσος with the word νάρκη, which is the name of a fish: the 'torpedo,' or 'numb-fish' (*Raia torpedo*), producing a numbing effect comparable to the impact of Sokrates' words (Pl. *Meno* 80a-c, 84b-c; *Resp.* 6.503d.)

Now, if we admit my hypothesis on the development of the Orpheus story for a moment, we may observe that Orpheus is not the only Greek hero to have started his existence as a girl: *Kainis* was the maiden name of king *Kaineus*, killed by the Kentaurs (Apollod. *Epit.* 1.22).²⁰ And we may add that the childhood of a Greek hero like Achilles has clearly feminine connotations—he was dressed as a young girl at the court of Lykomedes at Skyros (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.13.8)—as if the puberty of the boy marked the passage not from childhood to adulthood but from the female to the male sex. In any case, the name *Agri-ope*, meaning 'Wild-voice,' belonging to Orpheus' wife before she became Eurydike, is a very appropriate name for a child born to Orpheus' own parents, *i.e.* to *Oi-agros* and to *Kalli-ope*. *Agri-ope* should in fact have been the name of the daughter born to *Oiagros* and to *Kalliope* rather than the name of their daughter-in-law. It would in fact have been a perfect name for their daughter.

To conclude this rapid excursion into Orphic territory, I would like to add that the association between Orpheus and the grouper, between *Orpheus* and *orphos*,

19 Cf. Frontisi in Frontisi and Vernant 1997:217-21.

20 Cf. Kirk 1970:201.

does not exclude the singer's association neither with *orphne*, 'darkness, in particular of the Netherworld,' (Eur. *HF* 46, 353), nor with *orphanos*, which is a term used not only to mean 'orphan' but also to designate a person who has lost children, husband, or wife, e.g. a 'widower.'²¹ Taken together, these words, along with the Greek name for the 'grouper,' have all contributed, at various stages, to the development of the Orpheus story, which may thus be considered as an exegesis, in the narrative mode, of the proper name *Orpheus*, or as a narrative exploitation of its semantic possibilities which, at the same time, becomes an exploration of Greek culture.

5. *Syloson's cloak*

So much for the name of Orpheus. I would now like to return to the 'generative' perspective which characterises Louis Gernet's approach to myth, to which I briefly referred at the outset. For it is not only proper names but also objects—and more specifically *agalmata*—that may constitute the element capable of guiding the elaboration of mythical narrative. In other terms, words and things are here equals, particularly when the object is as significant as a piece of weaving.

Every four years in ancient Athens, two young girls assisted by married women weave a spectacular *peplos* which will be carried in procession to the Acropolis. The symbolism of this piece of cloth does not leave any room for doubt: it is the political unity of the city that here takes the form of a woven piece of cloth, or fabric (Scheid and Svenbro 1994:27-30, 1996:18-21). A similar celebration in Elis, in the Peloponnesus, is founded on the same principle. In order to celebrate the Festival of Hera, a group of sixteen Elean women weave a garment, or *peplos*, for the goddess, an operation that Pausanias explains in the following way: after a period of hostilities in the past, the sixteen Elean cities decided to make peace and chose one venerable woman from each of the sixteen cities to participate in the collective weaving of a new *peplos* for the goddess. The 'federation' thus created renews its political unity every four years by making the Sixteen Women repeat the original operation, furnishing a new dress for the cult statue of Hera (Scheid and Svenbro 1994:18-23, 1996:10-15).

The political symbolism of weaving and fabric is thus very ancient. And this suggests that the very elaborate exploration of the metaphor of weaving in Plato's *Statesman* is not a philosopher's invention but his use of a traditional exegesis in which weaving, or fabric, becomes one of the most important figures of the city-state (Scheid and Svenbro 1994:32-42, 1996:22-33). The magnificent fabric woven by the Weaver King in Plato's dialogue is nothing but the figure of the best city-state. In fact, crossing the 'warp,' which is virile and solid (the Greek term *stemon*

21 The meaning of ὀρφανός is fundamentally 'bereft of.' Cf. Eur. *Or.* 1136. Cf. also Hsch. ὀρφο-βόται, 'who bring up orphans,' showing the equivalence of ὀρφο- and ὀρφανο-.

is masculine), with the 'woof,' which is female and supple (the Greek term *kroke* is actually feminine), is the fundamental gesture of this myth, the meaning of which is union.

It is precisely in the light of this 'myth' that we should read a story, told by Herodotus, with which I would like to conclude. We find it at the end of Book iii in his *History of the Persian Wars*, in a passage dealing with the conquest of the island of Samos by king Darius (Hdt. 3.139-49).²² Syloson was the brother of the tyrant Polykrates, who had banished him from Samos. During the Egyptian campaign of Kambyases, king of Persia, Syloson was one of the many Greeks who joined the expedition. One day when he was walking in the market-place of Memphis, Syloson had put on a remarkable 'red cloak' (*chlanis purrhe*). At this time, Darius was but the body-guard of Kambyases; on seeing Syloson's cloak, he wanted to have it and asked if he could buy it. 'Syloson perceived how anxious he was,' writes Herodotus, 'and by a lucky inspiration answered: "There is no price at which I would sell my cloak, but I will give it to you for nothing, if you wish it." Darius thanked him, and accepted the garment. Poor Syloson felt at the time that he had fooled away his cloak in a very simple manner' (Hdt. 3.139-40; transl. by G. Rawlinson).

Some years pass by. Kambyases dies and Darius, his ancient body-guard, becomes king in his place. When Syloson learns that the man to whom he had given his cloak has become king, he goes to Susa and sits down at the gate of the royal palace, telling the doorkeeper that he is an ancient benefactor of the king. On learning that a Greek who pretends to be his benefactor is sitting in front of the palace, the king is at first puzzled. But then he calls for Syloson to come. Syloson tells him the story of the red cloak and Darius perfectly remembers it. Even if the gift had been small, he says, he still appreciates Syloson's generosity and declares that he is willing to give Syloson as much gold and silver that he wants from the royal treasure so that he 'may never repent of having rendered a service to Darius.' Syloson answers in the following manner:

'Give me not, O king, either silver or gold, but recover me Samos, my native land . . . Give me Samos, I beg; but give it unharmed, with no bloodshed—no leading into captivity' (Hdt. 3.140).

And this is how Syloson—not without complications, however—came to power in Samos.

In an analysis that takes the system of reciprocal gift-giving into account, there is nothing surprising with the lack of symmetry between the objects exchanged, as is well-known.²³ But even if we admit that the gift in return should be more valuable than the gift it answers, the disproportion between the cloak and the city of

22 Cf. Scheid-Tissinier 1994:66-67.

23 See for example Bourdieu 1972:13-44.

Samos is too great to be considered as normal. On the level of the 'toil' or 'labour' necessary for the making of an object, *i.e.* on the level of *kamatos*—the Greek verb *kamnein* applies to the manufacture of a cloak as well as to the construction of ships or of a whole city (*astu*)²⁴—, the exchange of the city for a cloak seems to be sheer folly: at first sight, there does not seem to exist a common standard for the objects exchanged.

But as soon as we place the story in the perspective of Gernet's article on 'mythical value,' which provided me with my starting-point, the absent parameter falls in place. For if the 'concatenation' of the notions of garment and city—which transforms the city into a metaphorical fabric—constitutes one of the most deep-rooted myths in ancient Greece, it is this myth that we have to take into account if we want to discover the mythical reason for the apparently insane exchange that takes place in the story. For the story of Syloson, which no doubt could have been included among the stories used by Gernet, makes the existence of a mythical, non economic value perfectly clear, a 'mythical value' in the light of which the exchange of gifts between Syloson and Darius appears completely reasonable. When Syloson learns that Darius has come to power, he may say to himself that it is his red cloak—the colour is not indifferent here²⁵—that has made a king of the one-time body-guard.

In other terms, this is the moment when the object 'sets the narrative imagination in motion,' to use Gernet's formula: in a certain way, I would say, the investiture of the king took place on the market-place down in Memphis, long before Darius became king. Retrospectively, Syloson's gesture becomes a gesture of investiture. In other words, the myth of the cloak—or, more generally, the myth of weaving and fabric—has made it possible to construct the past in the light of the present. Under these circumstances, what is more normal than demanding the city of Samos in exchange of the red cloak? In any case, the kingdom of Darius is infinitely bigger than the island of Samos. If there is a lack of symmetry in this exchange, it is rather to the advantage of Darius and not the other way around. In any case, the city of Samos was well worth a cloak.

24 *LSJ* s.v. κάμνω, 1.

25 See Heraclit. fr. A2 Diels-Kranz; cf. Gernet 1957, Gerschel 1966, Ellinger 1993:202-203.

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The symbol of the warrior in Greek tragedy?

Synnøve des Bouvrie

THE PRESENT contribution aims at exploring Greek tragedy within the vast and varied field of myth and symbol. I propose to investigate the way culturally important notions and values, that is symbols, emerge and are revitalised within this cultural medium. Complexes of notions and values, which are central to a community are labeled key symbols. They can be identified by several criteria, first and foremost by the amount of attention devoted to them and the wealth of expressions, discussion, rules and taboos surrounding them.¹

The notion and value of the warrior was central to ancient society and we may thus expect that this key symbol emerged in Attic drama. Given the fact that cultural symbols tend to manifest themselves in collective celebrations, we may assume the theatre to offer some examples of this manifestation. The theatre institution certainly was a collective celebration, framed within time and space, and gathering the community in a symbolic process. The ancient theatre of Dionysos was situated within the sacred space of Dionysos' sanctuary, and its celebrations were organised according to sacred time, the *Rural Dionysia*, the *Lenaia*, and the *City Dionysia*. The entire citizenship congregated in regular collective festivities, which were essentially public celebrations within the Athenian demes and polis.² The rites and ceremonies surrounding the theatre performances as well as the way they were organised do not leave any doubt that the events were embraced with the most serious public attention.

While the arrangement was in the hands of the chief magistrate, the *arkhon eponymos*, the choruses consisted of citizens performing their civic duty, being organised according to their membership in a *phyle* or civic tribe.³ The prize-winning dramas were selected by a jury of 10 members, one from each of the civic tribes.⁴ Paying the costs of production was assigned to wealthy citizens who in this way per-

1 Ortner 1973:1339.

2 Pickard-Cambridge 1968:57ff.

3 Pickard-Cambridge 1968:58, 76, 88.

4 Pickard-Cambridge 1968:96ff.; Pope 1986.

formed their duty towards the community. Citizens not in a position to attend the theatre festival received public support, the *theorikon*, funds providing free entrance.⁵

The Attic theatre then differed in important ways from our modern theatre institution: it expected the audience to attend the performances. We should not hesitate therefore to call this theatre a 'ritual' theatre, in the sense of a phenomenon attracting the community towards its awe-inspiring magnetic centre. By contrast, our modern theatre expects us to keep a certain aesthetic distance. For this reason I would qualify our modern theatre as an 'aesthetic theatre.' Ancient Greek theatre on the other hand appeared within a religious setting presupposing and revitalising shared meanings.

This view of Greek theatre and drama finds support in several Ancient testimonies, some of which I will briefly discuss. What is characteristic of this theatre is its polarisation between tragic vs. comic expression, with a mitigated form of tragedy represented in satyr drama. The clear distinction between tragic and comic events is certainly one of subject matter, mythical heroes on the one hand, and ordinary human beings or historical persons on the other.

In tragic events the heroes are suffering and awaiting disaster, inexorably hunted down by fate, in comic events we witness the heroisation of the powerless, miraculously attaining power and triumphing through the implausible whims of luck.⁶

Both genres created a *mundus inversus*, 'verkehrte Welt' or *world upside-down* on stage, disrupting the normal moral and social order, a common cultural phenomenon (Luria 1929, Kenner 1970, Babcock 1978, Auffarth 1991, Baudy 1993). The comic theatre of Aristophanes created a carnival world on stage, disrupting the laws of nature and abolishing the norms of society, a ridiculous topsy-turvey, in order to rouse boisterous laughter in the audience.

In a similar way tragic theatre created its own *world upside down*, a revolting inversion, disrupting the values and institutions of the social world, but this time in order to rouse tragic reactions.⁷ These tragic reactions, labelled *eleos* and *phobos*, 'shock' and 'horror',⁸ are mentioned by several authors of the classical age, by Gorgias, Plato, and other sources, and they are studied explicitly by Aristoteles.⁹ In his

5 Pickard-Cambridge 1968:270.

6 For the distinction between the tragic and the comic genre see Taplin 1986, cf. Landfester 1977:210ff.

7 Cf. Turner and Turner 1982: 204, 'In liminality, "dramatic" performances may be presented, by ritual specialist or adepts, drawn from episodes in myths or religious epics. Such myths often embody cultural ideals, but often they transcend or transgress conventional morality when portraying the deeds of deities or heroes, the originators of cosmos, nature and society.'

8 For the semantic content see the study by Schadewaldt 1955. For a detailed discussion of the issue see Bouvrie 1988.

9 Bouvrie 1990:67ff.

Chapter 14 Aristotle discusses the conditions for creating a tragic effect by choosing the proper relationship between the antagonists:

But when these terrible acts happen within relationships of *philia*, for example when a brother kills or intends to kill a brother, or a son his father or a mother her son or a son his mother or they do something similar, [the poet] must seek to achieve this.¹⁰

Philoï, that is relatives and adopted relatives, were bound together by the bonds of *philia*, solidarity and reciprocity.¹¹ In my interpretation this passage implies that the tragic emotions, which I translate as ‘shock’ and ‘horror’, are not a consequence of any physical violence as such, tragic shock and horror were the reflex-like reactions upon the violation of a fundamental institution in society, *philia*.

When Plato in Book 8 of the *Laws* discusses the sanctions upon crime, he states that some crimes are so unspeakable, and abhorred even by the gods, that we need not codify them in law. These crimes (he hints at incest) are condemned in everyday life, he tells us, but in addition they are exposed in drama as well:

Each of us hears this [the shame of incestuous acts] always and everywhere expressed, it is mentioned in comic contexts but often also in the serious medium of tragedy (Pl. *Leg.* 838c).

Plato in fact offers Oidipous and other mythical characters as examples of offenders against the incest prohibition, again implying that the violation of the social order is at work in tragic drama.

I would however not maintain, as Plato suggests, that the workings of tragedy were moralistic. On the contrary, it is an important feature of tragedy to blur the boundaries of deserved and undeserved disaster. The audience is discouraged to think in simple categories of crime and punishment, good and evil, immoral and moral. Instead there is some overwhelming, inescapable necessity, inexorable death and fate pulling down the events, in opposition to comedy, where these powers evaporate into the fantastic air of resilient vitality, invincibility, and wish fulfilment.

When we consider the nature of Attic tragedy we have to distinguish between on the one hand the ‘*dramatic*’ events, the more or less recognisable world of the characters, their motivations, conflicts and actions—that is morals—and on the other hand running through these events what we may label the ‘*symbolic*’ strand of fundamental values and institutions of the Athenian polis, key symbols, unargued for and independent of the motives and conflicts of the characters. Following Aristotle I would suggest that tragic drama as a genre presented violations of this ‘*symbolic*’ order, the disruptions of central values and institutions, in short, a breach in the community’s key symbols, in order to rouse the prescribed tragic re-

10 Arist. *Poet.* 1453b12-26 (the author’s transl.).

11 Dirlmeyer 1931, Adkins 1963, Herman 1987.

actions, Aristotle's 'shock' and 'horror', with the effect of revitalising these key symbols. The disruptive elements constitute the 'tragic' process of the drama, all the defects, shortcomings, anomalies, threatening and realised transgressions and violations of the world order as well as the staged reactions to these violations, the lyrical outbursts and other exclamations of shock and horror echoing globally the 'prescribed' reactions in contemporary audiences. These reactions, I suggest, are to be understood as immediate reflexes rather than reflection, provoked by a cultural world upside down (Stallybrass and White 1995).

This complex composition may explain the distortions of tragic drama, the often exaggerated lyrical outbursts, the sudden and unmotivated actions of the characters, the multiple plots, the apparently incongruous events, and not in the least the fact that quite a few tragedies end in a mood of comfort or even jubilation.

In this connection I emphasise that the tragic *disruption* of some institution may be followed by a *restoration*. This restoration however should not be confused with a happy ending, which is a feature of the dramatic events, and a function of the audience's sympathy for some of the characters. A restoration on the contrary is a cancelling of the disruption of some key institution and values in the *symbolic* strand: when in the end the violation is dissolved, the audience is relieved, even though sympathetic characters may be struck down. The development of Sophokles' *Antigone* may serve as an example, in which the protagonist dies, thereby causing an unhappy end. However, the key symbol of *philia* and the norm of burying one's *philoï*, which is being violated during the dramatic events, is eventually restored. The horrible acts of sending the living below the earth (Antigone when enclosed alive in her cave), while leaving the dead unburied above the earth (Polyneikes' corpse lying unburied), generate the tragic workings in the drama (Bouvrie 1990:188)

The dramatic composition as a whole is then subordinated to the demands of the 'tragic' process, first and foremost creating an *inversion*, the violation of institutions and values around which the drama evolves. The results of these complex workings are the well-known 'defective' dramas, those with double plots, disappearing protagonists, unmotivated reactions and other breaches of dramatic composition. A phenomenon I have labelled *twisting*,¹² I think, is due to the processual nature of ancient tragedy, subordinating the representation of consistent characters (*mimesis*) to the demand for tragic effects, and creating shifts of emphasis and sympathy during the events.¹³ We may consider as an example the twisting of Kreon's and Polyneikes' statuses within the *Antigone*: Kreon is initially presented as a reasonable decision maker, justified in his demand for retribution against the en-

12 Bouvrie 1990:318f. and s.v. 'shift of emphasis/sympathy.'

13 For detailed analyses of the following see Bouvrie 1990, 1997 and forthcoming.

emy. Polyneikes is simultaneously presented as an abominous traitor threatening the city. In the course of the tragedy Kreon is twisted into a tyrant, while Polyneikes' status is twisted into a *philos*.¹⁴

General overview of the symbolic level in tragic drama

Tragic drama, it seems, evolved around the fundamental institutions of the *oikos* and the *polis*. The *oikos* with its complex relationships, rules and norms, constituted a key symbol within Greek culture. It consisted of its essential members, the male head and his descendant (both are missing in Sophocles' *Elektra*, the male head is destroyed in Euripides' *Andromakhe*), as well as his wife (missing in Euripides' *Alkestis*). Husband and wife are to be united in normal marriage (disrupted in the drama about *Danaos' daughters*, and in *Oidipous*), there has to be a proper hierarchy between male and female (inverted in *Oresteia*, cf. Zeitlin 1978), succession is to be guaranteed (disrupted in *Medeia* and missing in *Andromakhe*, missing, but restored in *Ion*), and marriage has to be monogamous, demanding strict marital fidelity of the wife (threatened in *Hippolytos* and in *Helene*), in order to secure legitimate successors to the *oikos*. Its members or *philoï*, should be duly honoured and protected in life (this norm is violated in *Oidipous*) and provided with burial rites when deceased (refused in *Antigone*).

In the dramas I have listed one or another of the *oikos* rules and values is violated. There may also be a disruption of the *polis*-institution, the social order *per se*, embodied by *Dike*, (violated in *Prometheus*), hospitality and *xenia* (disrupted in *Hekabe*), some rite ordained by the gods (in *Bakkhai* the taboo on male intrusion in the female rites is inverted, cf. Bouvrie 1997). These fundamental values on which the tragic action turned were subconsciously revitalised by the audience's sense of shock and horror when confronted with the outrageous violations enacted on the stage. During the dramatic performance the tragic inversion of the central symbols of *oikos* and *polis* in their various aspects were thus staged in order to be recreated and revitalised.

The institution or key symbol of the warrior

The *polis* symbol I now will draw attention to is that of the institution of the warrior.¹⁵ The way warriors were honoured in ancient Greece testifies to their crucial value to the *polis*.¹⁶ The warrior's nature and the rules and restrictions surrounding this institution certainly qualifies it for the status of key symbol. In several trage-

14 Bouvrie 1990:191f.

15 On war in general see e.g. Detienne 1968, Vernant 1968, Vidal-Naquet 1968, Garland 1972, Pritchett 1971, 1974, 1985. Hanson 1989.

16 E.g. Jacoby 1944, Clairmont 1970, Loraux 1981b, Stupperich 1972, Bergemann 1997.

dies this symbol is underlying the dramatic events. But the importance of the warrior is not expressed directly by way of a positive discourse, it is implied in the dramatic action, which disrupts the normal world order presenting an absent or an abnormal warrior.

Warrior cult

Athenian culture in the classical age not only honoured their fallen warriors, they considered warfare an unquestionable element of male nature.¹⁷ Men who died in war were honoured in military oratory and poetry with the predicate *aner agathos genomenos*, 'proved himself an excellent male.'¹⁸

Homer presenting a standard for the Greek world already drew the contours of the ideal warrior: he is brave, a real man (*andreios*), he is in the bloom of his youth and strength (*anthos hebes*), and he dies young.

When great warriors die it is said that: his soul went to Hades, lamenting its fate and leaving behind his manhood and youth (*androteta kai heben* Hom. *Il.* 22.363; 16.857). Aineias has the bloom of youth (*hebes anthos*), which is the mightiest strength (*kratos megiston*, Hom. *Il.* 13.484).¹⁹

We will see that these sentiments surrounding the warrior are still alive in Athens in the classical age. In the epigram poems on their war memorials we find: the noble death (*thanatos kalos*) of the proper male (*aner agathos*), the excellence and 'manliness' (*arete, andreia*) he exhibits, and the loss of his youthful strength (*hebe*, e.g. Peek 1955:nrs. 13, 14, 18, 20 Peek 1960:nrs. 8, 9, 11, 12).²⁰

Collective burial of the fallen

Men who died in combat were cremated on the battle field. Their bones were collected and buried collectively in a mass grave, *polyandrion*, on the public burial ground, the *Demosion sema*, in the Kerameikos.

A prominent official delivered the funeral speech praising the courage of the fallen, who had died a noble death, *thanatos kalos*. There is no reason for doubting that warriors were surrounded with the utmost care and extraordinary awe, raising them to superhuman status, suggesting that death on the battlefield meant 'life' as a hero.²¹ Those who fell at Marathon were held in exceptional honour as *heroas*

17 Meier 1990:87, 1991:44.

18 Loraux 1981b:99.

19 Loraux 1981a. On the reading of Ploutarkhos (Plut. *Lyc.* 27.1-4) on the Spartan funeral rules (37) see however Toher 1999:122-125.

20 Loraux 1975.

21 Hoffmann 1999:132.

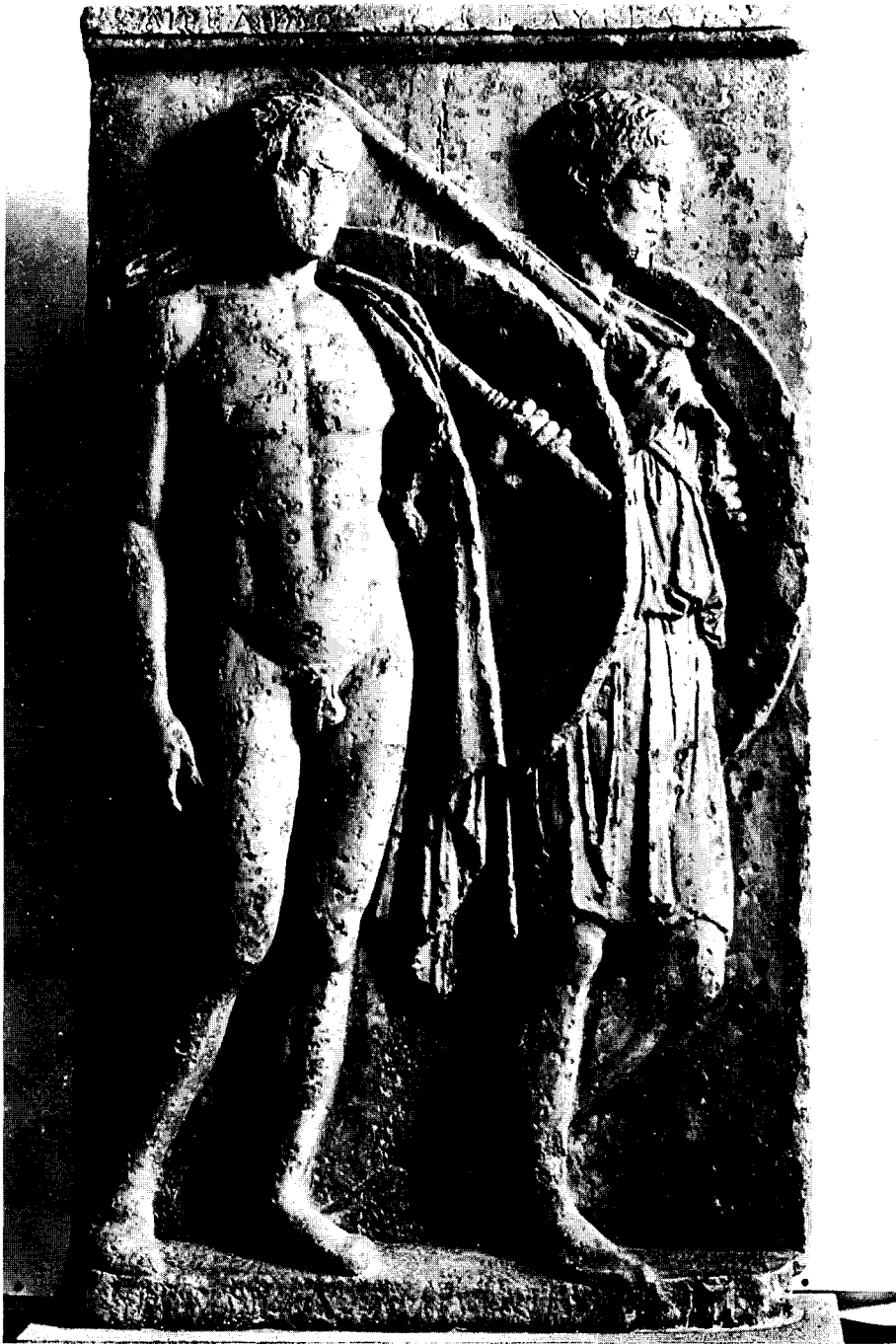


Fig. 1 Grave stele from Salamis for Khairedemos and Lykeas, who have probably fallen in war. The relief shows two hoplite warriors carrying large shields (hoplon) and lances, which were partly painted. From the last part of the 5th century BC. Clairmont 2.156 (v.). Piraeus Museum nr. 385.

(Paus. 1.32.4), but the care for ordinary warriors took over elements from the same tradition.

In epigrams the fallen are frequently represented as having left their 'aglaon *heben*' (radiant youth), in spite of the fact that hoplites often were of mature age or even greyhired (e.g. Clairmont 1983: nr. 32b, Athens EM 10618, pls. 45-46). In the context of funeral poetry then the tradition of the youthful warrior remains, the concept of 'hebe' now carrying clear overtones of 'supreme male strength'.²²

Euripides, Iphigeneia in Aulis

The Akhaian fleet is waiting for prosperous winds in Aulis in order to sail to Troy. King Agamemnon has received an oracle from the goddess Artemis demanding that he should sacrifice his daughter Iphigeneia. The king sends a message to his wife Klytaimnestra and tells her that Iphigeneia is to be married to Akhilleus. King Agamemnon develops his treacherous plans inviting his wife Klytaimnestra to come with his daughter to the military camp in Aulis. He has decided to kill his daughter as a sacrifice to the goddess. Akhilleus tries to rescue Iphigeneia, but the army threatens him, and Iphigeneia suddenly declares herself prepared to die for the benefit of Hellas. When she is to be slain, a deer is sent in her place by Artemis.

In Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Aulis* a female is being brought to the warrior camp where she 'will be married to Achilleus'. The warrior being a male corresponds to the female status of the bride, male and female thus fulfilling their essential nature.²³ In the course of events however instead of being given in marriage she will be sacrificed. It has been stated that Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Aulis* mixes the worlds of marriage and sacrifice.²⁴ But the drama in a far more surprising way blurs the boundary between marriage and war.

Initially Iphigeneia conforms to the roles of female and bride, submitting to the wishes of her parents²⁵ and expressing anxiety for her chastity.²⁶ She manifests a violent fear of death supplicating her father to spare her life: 'Whoever desires to die is mad; to live in dishonour (*kakos*) is preferable to dying glorious (*kalos thanein*).'²⁷ Suddenly however Iphigeneia heroically accepts her fate and is thus transformed from bride into warrior, dying a heroic death. 'I have decided to die; this I wish to accomplish honourably (*eukleos*), dismissing all ignoble ways (*to dusgenes*).'²⁸

22 Mitchell 1996:96.

23 Vernant 1974, Loraux 1981a.

24 Borghini 1986 has studied the parallels between the nuptial rites, *proteleia*, for Artemis, and sacrificial rites before battle, e.g. Eur. *IA* 718. Cf. Foley 1985.

25 E.g. Eur. *IA* 631-677, 1279.

26 Eur. *IA* 1340ff.

27 Eur. *IA* 1252f.

28 Eur. *IA* 1375f.

Her death inverts the proper course of female destiny, which would be marriage, and it is this immature, 'unnatural' because female, death which prompts the drama's tragic lament. At the same time an improper warrior emerges, who, being a heroic young woman violates the gender norm.

It is strange of course, that the wedding is prepared in a military camp, or that the mother of the bride is ordered to go home instead of adorning and accompanying her daughter at the wedding. What is still more surprising is the fact that after having lamented her fate in a childlike manner, Iphigeneia suddenly declares herself prepared to be sacrificed.²⁹ The motive for launching the war expedition is similarly changed. Initially the war against Troy was a revenge expedition in order to punish Paris for having kidnapped Helene (71-83, 171-180, 488, 582-589, 764-772, 879-881). However, justifying his decision in front of his wife and daughter Agamemnon suddenly proclaims that the expedition must be carried through on behalf of Hellas and the protection of Hellenic women in general (1264-1272). And in her heroic speech Iphigeneia declares herself prepared to give her life (*soma* 1397) for the freedom of Hellas (1384, 1400f.). We are thus witnessing the phenomenon of *twisting*, the changing of the balance of motives and perspectives, in order to create the inversion of normality. The scope of the war is changed from a revenge expedition to a panhellenic mobilisation.³⁰

Like an ideal hoplite would do (*andres aspisin pephragmenoi* 1387ff.) Iphigeneia is suddenly prepared of her own free will (1375f.) to die for her homeland (1503), asking her family not to lament or shed tears (1433-35, 1466), nor to cut their hair in sorrow or dress in funeral garment (1437f., 1448). She desires to rescue (*soisai* 1420, *soteria* 1472f.) Hellas and win a warrior's glory, *kleos* (1376, 1383, 1504, cf. 1440),³¹ urging the chorus to entone a *paian* (1468).³²

When Achilles praises Iphigeneia's excellent courage (*lem' ariston*, 1421), he echoes the award for outstanding courage, the *aristeion*,³³ won on the battlefield. Iphigeneia is given titles and epithets appropriate to gloryfying war heroes, 'Benefactress' of Hellas (1446), 'Destroyer of Troy' (1475f., cf. 1511), and she expects a war memorial, *mnema* (1444). Iphigeneia thus in fact expresses her own funeral oration (the traditional *epitaphios logos*). All these elements belong to the warrior's ethos: the hoplite will be prepared to give his life for the freedom of his homeland,³⁴

29 Buxton 1988 explicitly notes the baffling effect of unexpected reversals like the one discussed.

30 Flower 2000.

31 Chant 1986:85, Loraux 1981b:51.

32 Although the *paian* was performed at different occasions, it belonged in particular to the sphere of war, Pritchett 1971:105.

33 Pritchett 1974:276-290.

34 Loraux 1981b:101.

winning eternal glory. When fallen he will be the object of praise, while it was improper to lament the noble death of the *andres agathoi genomenoi*.³⁵

During the drama an intertwining of the worlds of war and marriage is created. It is noteworthy that the chorus of women arriving from the city of Chalkis express their feeling of shame and embarrassment at arriving at the military camp and transgressing the boundary between the female and male worlds (1886ff.), poetically signalled by the Euripos, the sea strait between Boiotia and Euboia. The chorus could have consisted of several categories of human beings. At several points in the drama the anomaly of female intrusion into the male realm is signalled. For the contemporary audience this development must have caused tragic reactions.

Towards the end of the drama a massive inversion of the proper social order is created, manifested in Iphigeneia's declaration that giving her life for Hellas will be equivalent to marrying and having children. Her self-sacrifice will offer her a lasting memorial (*mnemeia dia makrou*, 1397ff.). This inversion causes horror among protagonists and chorus alike, the reason for this being the fact that it is a female who is sacrificing herself 'in war'.

The specific *tragic* quality of a tragedy then does not lie in its way of representing the world, its imitation or *mimesis*. Other forms of poetry or art also create first and foremost a recognisable world. Tragedy affects the audience with shock and horror as a result of presenting events which mean a violation of the normal social order.

The death of a male for the cause of his homeland would have been praised as a noble death and a reason for pride. The death of a young woman, that is, a potential bride, evokes the most bitter lament. This inversion does however not only dominate the end. The goddess' demand for sacrifice is announced early in the drama and directs the dramatic events. The doom hanging over Iphigeneia prompts Akhilleus to stand up and defend her. Akhilleus' declaration in defence of Iphigeneia drives the tragic process, the ebb and flow of imminent and averted violation of the symbolic order of *oikos* and *polis*, in dramatic terms the waves of fear and hope, until the young woman goes to her death, disrupting the normal social order of marriage and warfare.

Rather than documenting the lamentable fate of an individual as our aesthetic theatre does, the ritual drama launches a disturbing inversion of the warrior symbol as well as a violation of female destiny, marriage, sending tragic shocks through the course of events. Being a woman and destined for marriage, the heroine is transformed into a courageous warrior, willingly going to her heroic self-sacrifice for the rescue of her *polis*. The end then does not offer any restoration of the proper

35 Loraux 1981b:44, 98ff.; Sourvinou-Inwood 1995:191.

order, it may however have included a final relief and comfort in a *deus ex machina* scene, as some verses cited by Aelian suggest, presenting Artemis' conciliatory pronouncement.

I will deliver into the hands of the Akhaians a horned hind,
when sacrificing it they will boast sacrificing your daughter
(Ael. NA 7.39)³⁶

Euripides, Trojan Women

Euripides' drama *The Trojan Women* brings Trojan wives and mothers on the scene who are utterly defenseless and lamenting their fate, since their sons and husbands have been killed. Even their last hope, Hektor's son Astyanax is in the end torn from his mother's arms and thrown from the walls of Troy. Towards the end he is being buried, lying in the big shield of his father, while his father's spear is to be planted on the grave. His grandmother Hekabe pronounces a ritual lament, and while Troy is set aflame she rushes into the ruins, but is halted by the chorus.

The drama has been criticised for being static, repetitive and lacking a clearly defined conflict.³⁷ The dramatic events develop around the protagonist, queen Hekabe, who witnesses how her daughters and daughter in law are dragged away into slavery by the victorious enemy. The *Trojan Women* presents abundant lamentation on the part of these women, who exclaim their utter helplessness in the absence of their husbands and sons. Most interpreters have therefore understood the drama as an accusation against war, on the part of the author, Euripides' pacifistic manifesto,³⁸ and a concrete protest against the Athenian brutality perpetrated on the Melians. In particular the poet is criticising the violation of women.³⁹

This interpretation however remains confined within the dramatic events only and does not pay attention to the positive expressions of the value of defending

36 Jouan 1990:26

ἔλαφον δ' Ἀχαιῶν χερσὶν ἐνθήσω φίλαις
κεροῦσσαν, ἦν σφάζοντες ἀυχῆσουσι σὴν
σφάζειν θυγατέρα.

37 E.g. Conacher 1967:139, 1983:334 conceives of the drama as 'a rhythm of hope and desolation.' Lesky 1972:391 'die parataktische Struktur dieses Dramas.' Albini 1970:153 'una seria di scene staccate.'

38 E.g. Manuwald 1987-88:396, 393, Byl 2000:51 'Le pacifisme d'Euripide n'éclate-t-il pas dans les vers ... 95-97?' Villemonteix 1985. Erp Taalman Kip 1987 however refutes the proposition that Euripides should condemn the Athenian destruction of Melos, concluding that the drama must have been completed before this act of violence occurred. Bosworth 1993:42ff. challenges the notion that Thucydides should have condemned the Melian expedition. 'There is no hint that Thucydides had any sympathy with the victims or even expected his readers to sympathise.'

39 Goldhill 1986:165f. 'The suffering of the female protagonists is conceived as the direct outcome of the actions of men Euripides challenges, then, the direct linkage of fifth-century militarism to homeric heroism.'

one's homeland which occur side by side with the abominations of war. This suggests that, in spite of the fact that nearly all the principal characters are women, the *Trojan Women* evolves around the warrior. While expressing their despair the women implicitly emphasise the importance of those who could have defended them, a key symbol in Greek culture.

The question that now arises is how such diverse utterances are to be understood. On the one hand one has the abomination of war, on the other hand an unequivocal praise of those who might stand up in defense. Answering this question I suggest that this ritual drama does not offer a positive version of the world; rather by documenting the horrors of war, it presents an inversion or disruption of the 'true and ideal' world order. In this way tragic drama *presupposes* 'the truth' rather than expresses it, its workings are like a hypothetical clause provoking cultural reflexes: 'War is horrible, *if* there are no warriors to defend the *polis*.' The drama develops by implying the normal and 'natural' existence of warriors, but it creates a *tragic world upside down*, in which all warriors are absent, exposing their wives and children to the arbitrary cruelty of the enemy. Far from condemning war, this drama thrives on the the essential value of the defender of the *polis*.

In the end Hekabe laments the fact that Hektor's son Astyanax' did not reach the age of manhood, *hebe*.⁴⁰ The young Astyanax' death becomes, in fact, the magnetic centre focusing on the value of the warrior.

The prologue is spoken by the gods Athena and Poseidon. Poseidon commenting on the behaviour of the Akhaian host foreshadows the future of those who, after winning the Trojan war, will be struck by disaster.⁴¹ This scene has the effect of creating an inimical attitude to the Akhaians while encouraging identification with the Trojans, a condition for appreciating the symbolic values underlying the drama. The god concludes his speech with a statement which is generally understood as a condemnation of waging war, the text being read and interpreted as follows:

That human being is a fool (*i.e.* immoral), whoever destroys cities, temples and grave monuments, the sacred places of the deceased; laying <them> waste he is ruined himself later on (95ff.)⁴²

40 His untimely death precluded him from reaching manhood and die for his *polis* (1168).

41 Eur. *Tro.* 72, 77-84

42 OCT ed. J. Diggle.

μῶρος δὲ θνητῶν ὅστις ἐκπορθεῖ πόλεις
ναοὺς τε τύμβους θ', ἱερὰ τῶν κεκμηκότων
ἐρημιά δούς <σφ'> αὐτὸς ἄλεθ' ὕστερον. (95ff.)

Page who has added the object <them> has created the second independent clause as a parallel expression to the first. In this interpretation the word 'αὐτὸς' (himself) lacks a clear function and the addition 'ὕστερον' (later on) does not seem necessary either: every punishment follows the crime.

In this interpretation being a fool, that is, immoral, and being ruined are seen as a necessary causal nexus, constituting the *apodosis* of the indefinite hypothetical clause, which is resumed by the participle clause. What is being expressed is a general condemnation of waging war and the proper retribution upon those who do so ('whoever' wages war).

The last sentence however includes the expressions '*autos*, himself,' which suggests the opposite 'others,' and '*husteron*, afterwards,' which implies a 'before.' The Greek clause may be construed with the conjunction *but* (*δὲ*, proposed by Blomfield) in line 96, so that 'who destroys ...' in the conditional clause is paralleled by the finite '*but ... afterwards is destroyed himself*' (97 ὄλετο).

I choose to follow the slightly different reading offered by Kovacs, who proposes that only the clause 'he is a fool' represents the *apodosis*—the meaning of '*moros*' being rather 'an object of ridicule, contempt' than 'immoral'⁴³—while the rest of the sentence constitutes the *protasis* clause.⁴⁴

That human being is a fool [an object of ridicule and contempt], whoever destroys cities, *but* laying waste temples and graves, the sacred places of the deceased, afterwards is destroyed himself (emphasis added).

The interpretation then will be: while he succeeds in winning a war over others, he does not succeed in avoiding his own destruction. With this expression Poseidon does not condemn war as such, he forebodes the destruction of his and Athena's enemies and expresses his hostility and contempt. Although the horrors of war were obvious, the thought of abolishing war did not emerge in classical Greece. In addition warfare was a central source of prestige.⁴⁵ This is expressed several times in the drama. The Trojans dying in defence of their homeland earned most honourable renown (*kleos* 386ff.), and

43 Cf. Hekabe's parallel sentence: 'The human being is a fool (θηητῶν δὲ μῶρος ὅστις), whoever while prospering rejoices [in this] thinking it is guaranteed.' (1203 f.).

44 Kovacs 1983:337. *δὲ* (line 96) was proposed by Blomfield

μῶρος δὲ θηητῶν ὅστις ἐκπορθεῖ πόλεις,
ναοὺς δὲ τύμβους θ', ἱερά τῶν κεκμηκότων,
ἐρημιά δούς αὐτὸς ὄλεθ' ὕστερον. (95ff.)

I would suggest that we keep the text as it is transmitted ἐκπορθεῖ, and interpret the clause ναοὺς ... δούς as a *distributio* equivalent to the general verb while introducing the contrast between destroying and being destroyed with *δὲ*: 'He is a fool, whoever destroys cities, but [having destroyed them] is afterwards destroyed himself,' cf. Kovacs' paraphrase (1983:337): 'Foolish is that mortal who sacks cities but who, when he has emptied the temples and tombs, holy places of the departed, perishes later himself.'

45 Runciman 1998: 742 'In this culture, there was no prestige to be gained by repudiating the values bound up with warfare as such. Nowhere out of Greek religion did there ever emerge either pacifists or conscientious objectors ... the variations all presupposed that hoplite warfare between citizens of rival *poleis* was an estimable as well as unavoidable human activity, and conformity to the "indicator traits" associated with it was the obvious means for adult males to acquire prestige.'

Hektor's fate proves that military glory is not despised (*doxas aristos* 395). In the same vein the notion of 'noble death' is expressed by Cassandra

Whoever is in his senses must avoid war;
Whenever it comes so far though, it is a not despisable crown [glory]
to be destroyed with honour for the *polis*, without honour it is ignoble.
(400ff.)

As often with Euripides, the part immediately following the expository prologue introduces the tragic process.⁴⁶ This 'emotional prologue' sounds the tone around the central inversion and launches strong emotions in Hekabe's lament, giving voice to the despair and utter desolation of the wives of the 'bronze-lanced Trojans.' (143).

Several interpreters have underscored the importance of erotic elements in the *Trojan women*, in particular Elizabeth Craik.⁴⁷ Cassandra the virgin is forced to become the concubine of the enemy (252ff.). The women foresee their fate as prisoners, now that the Trojans have been massacred (562ff.). To Andromakhe the mere thought of being unfaithful to her former husband is abhorrent (662ff.). The fact that the Trojan catastrophe is seen from the viewpoint of the women victims, who are exposed to the mercy of their enemies and incapable of defending themselves serves again to exacerbate the reactions of the male audience. Already early in the drama the loss of males is signaled, the death of Priamos and his sons is deplored (41), an alarm bell which will gradually sound louder. Andromakhe addressing Hekabe presents a panegyric of her husband Hektor:

Mother of the man who with his spear destroyed most Argives (610f.)

During the *parodos* Hekabe once more laments the destruction of the *polis* (173) and the distress of enslavement (194ff.), while the chorus amplifies her lament. The following episode brings on the scene the despair of the prisoners of war in all its horror. They are assigned by lot to the enemy, deprived of all dignity, terror stricken, degraded, delivered to slavery, and robbed of their children (239-292). The episode is ended with Hekabe's complaint that her excellent sons have fallen, by the lance of the Akhaians (475-479). In the next episode Hektor's son Astyanax is brought together with the bronze arms of his father Hektor (574), who is invoked as the protector of his wife (587, 590). Andromakhe's desperate apostrophe to her husband (673f.) underscores that the wives are reduced to slavery and drawn in exile as result of the warriors' absence (677f.). The episode ends with Talthybios announcing the death sentence of Astyanax (719), the male who had been the ultimate hope of reviving the *polis* (703ff.).⁴⁸

46 Bouvrie 1990 (1992): e.g. 226, 247, 279, 299.

47 Craik 1990:14 'Marriage and what can be done with it is the vehicle, almost the "objective correlative" ... of the play's dramatic statement.'

Nor will the father's kin be there or the force of the Trojans (754). Talthybios' order is accompanied by a menace towards Andromakhe:

You do not have protection anywhere, you have to realise;
the city is destroyed as is your husband,
and you are in our hands (730).

The central episode offers a fierce debate between Hekabe, Menelaos and Helene, bringing into focus a wife's obligation of chastity (1027, 1056), and the honour and shame surrounding this value (982, 1013, 1027, 1041). We may then suggest that the symbol of marriage is drawn into the centre of attention as well, exacerbating the future fate of the prisoner women.

After the debate scene the chorus once more addresses their husbands complaining of their powerlessness in front of the victorious Akhaians (1081 ff.), their inability to protect their children (1098f.), in particular the vulnerability of their daughters (1091 ff.).

Andromakhe has now left, forced to follow Neoptolemos, while apostrophizing her husband's grave and once more praying that their child be buried in the shield of his father, once 'the terror of the Akhaians' (1130-1142). The way this object is given prominence in the drama supports the hypothesis that the symbolic centre of the tragedy is the institution of the hoplite warrior, expressed in the image of the hoplite's crucial attribute, his large shield (*hoplon*). Hekabe's monologue before burying her grandson Astyanax further strengthens this assumption. She introduces her funeral lament speaking to Hektor's child (1167), to his shield (1194, 1221f.), and to his son's arm (1178). Hekabe addresses the shield, as if she spoke to her son Hektor, the defender of Troy, bursting into a lyrical hymn to the honour and glory of the great warrior. Hektor's son will not reach the age of 'hebe, manhood' and fall for his city (1167 ff.), but he will fill the shield, that brought his father the greatest honour (1225). Hektor's arm as well as his shield, the latter being personified as the 'mother of innumerable victories' (!), are amplified with Homeric *epitheta ornantia* 'bronze-clad', 'noble-limbed' and later on 'noble-victorious' (*kallinike*), an expression which is the cult epithet of Herakles, the protector of warriors (1221f.).⁴⁹

The burning of Troy prompts the women to leave for their slaves' abode (1311) addressing their fallen husbands and sons in despair (1303, 1309).

48 '... not to keep alive the son of 'excellent' Hektor (723, cf. 709)

'Hektor however will not emerge from the earth
grasping his famous lance to your rescue' (752f.).

49 Eur. *Tro.* 1193f., 1221 χαλκόνωτον, καλλίπηχυν, καλλίνικε.

Euripides, Herakles

In the first part Herakles' aged father Amphitryon, his wife Megara, and his young sons are threatened by the usurper king Lykos in Thebes. While Herakles is absent in Hades, Lykos has decided to kill them and is about to drag them from the altar of Zeus. Just in time Herakles arrives and succeeds in saving his family. He kills Lykos. Suddenly Iris and Lyssa (Madness) arrive, sent by Hera. They strike Herakles with mad rage, and he attacks and kills his children and wife. He is only stopped by Athena from killing his father. In the last part of the drama Herakles is calmed by king Theseus who promises to hand over all his shrines in Attika and escort him to Athens.

Euripides' *Herakles* presents at the dramatic level a series of highly disturbing events with sudden and violent shifts in the intrigue. This drama which is split into two (or three) separate actions has brought interpreters to despair.⁵⁰

How indeed can we understand a drama in which the protagonist comes to the rescue of his beloved *philoï*, only to kill them immediately afterwards in mad rage, without any reasonable motive, just by the intervention of some divine power? How in addition should we explain the fact that the protagonist is one of the most revered heroes of Athenian cult?⁵¹

We should however by now be prepared to ask questions about the specific *tragic* quality of this drama. We should not ask: how is the hero represented (through *mimesis*) and what document does his portrait offer us on human existence in general? Nor again: How does the hero's horrible act develop causally? Instead we should explore: What fundamental institution or values, that is, key symbol, is violated, which social roles are involved? Now defending one's *philoï*, kin and adopted kin, and killing one's *ekhthroi*, enemies, are the central duties of a warrior. We may therefore once more start with the working hypothesis that Euripides' *Herakles* turns around the key symbol of the warrior, and compare its prominence in Athenian culture. Not *human* existence is at stake, but the nature of the *adult male warrior* and the conditions of his existence.

The cult of Herakles

The cult of Herakles was particularly vital in Athens. Young warriors were trained as boys at the gymnasium, until they were of mature age. War training was put under the protection of Hermes and Herakles. In Kynosarges, Akademeia, Melite, Marathon, and Tetrakomos they had a common altar.⁵² The ephebes had

50 E.g. Chalk (1962:7) 'Despite the discussion of a hundred years, the unity of Euripides' *Herakles* remains a problem'. Cf. Shelton 1979.

51 Woodford 1971.

52 Woodford 1971:214.



Fig. 2 Votive relief from Attika dedicated to Herakles Alexikakos (*Averter of evil*). Herakles stands near a four-column Doric shrine related to the *oinisteria* ritual of the *ephebes*. Hermes approaches from the left. Both were central in the education of young warriors. Early 4th century BC. Boston Museum of Fine Arts, MFA nr. 96.696

to swear their oath of loyalty to the polis invoking a number of divinities among whom Herakles.⁵³

It was from the shrine of Herakles in Marathon that the hoplite army departed for the battle against the Persians, and the army returned to Herakles' shrine in Kynosarges (Hdt. 6.108, 116). After the famous battle the athletic celebration was organised on a pan-Attic scale.⁵⁴ The painting which was set up in commemoration in the Stoa Poikile on the Agora represented the battle scene, with Athena and Herakles witnessing the event as well as Theseus rising from the soil (Paus. 1.15.39).

There were many other, minor, shrines dedicated to Herakles, at which the young warriors offered their hair and celebrated their coming of age, at a rite called *oinisteria*.⁵⁵ To adult men he could figure as the prototype of the hoplite warrior. Just before the Battle of Leuktra in 371 the Thebans received a favourable omen: the arms hanging in the Herakleion had disappeared from the walls of the shrine,

53 Cf. the inscription found at Akharnai, Conomis 1959:120.

54 Woodford 1971:217.

55 Hsch. s.v. '*oinisteria*', Phot. *Bibl.* s.v. '*oinisteria*', Ath. 11.494f., cf. Woodford 1971:214, Travlos 1971:274ff., Walter 1937.



Fig. 3 Red-figure Attic pelikè vase. Herakles attacks Geras (Old-Age, GERAS is added on the vase). From the Geras-painter, about 480-70 BC. Beazley, ARV 175.11. Brommer AA 67, 1952. Paris, Musée du Louvre nr. G 234. Photo RMN-Hervé Lewandowski.

just as if Herakles had gone to battle, Xenophon tells us (*Xen. Hell.* 6.4.7). A prominent cult epithet of Herakles is *Kallinikos* ('Noble Victory,' Conomis 1959:130).

Xenophon the Athenian who led the expedition of ten thousand warriors home from Persia in 400, tells us in his work *Anabasis* how he rallied his troops before a hoplite attack: 'My men, you should keep in mind how many battles we have gone through with the aid of the gods, so you should follow Herakles as your leader, *hegemon*.' Later on Xenophon sacrifices to Herakles and consults the god about his strategy (*Xen. An.* 6.5.25).

The representation of Herakles in mythical tales and iconography includes scenes in which the hero, the paragon of Greek male strength and warrior excellence, fights a peculiar creature, named *Geras*, Old Age (*LIMC s.v.* 'Geras,' Brommer 1952, Hafner 1958, Shapiro 1993:89-94). In other scenes Herakles is welcomed at Mount Olympos as a god and married to *Hebe*, Youth (*LIMC s.v.* 'Hebe'), Schauenburg 1963:127, Harrison 1967:52, Laurens 1996:239).

These aspects combine to a symbol of glorious male strength, celebrated in *Hebe*, and opposed to *Geras*. In contexts of war and war training, then, Herakles figures as the magnetic field generating feelings of awe for the warrior symbol.

Euripides' drama

With this brief overview of Athenian customs, cult and symbolic representations, we should once more consider Euripides' *Herakles*. The initial situation of the drama is the danger which threatens Herakles' family, his aged father Amphitryon, his three small sons and his wife Megara. The person of Lykos has been invented, but in Athenian tradition the hero Theseus has two enemies of the same name, suggesting that the audience associated the name with 'enemy'.⁵⁶ Amphitryon wishes he still had his *hebe*, and the chorus which consists of former warriors deplores their state of weakness in the *parodos*, emphasising their age (*geron geronta* 126) and looking back to the time they carried their spear in common attack.⁵⁷

The first part of the *Herakles* can thus be said to create a tragic disruption of the normal world order. There are no adult warriors present able to protect their *polis*, their aged parents, their wives and children (295-300, 322-326). In the hero's absence his family is defenseless.

After this scene the chorus sing an ode to the glory of Herakles' invincible strength (348-435), while they end their ode lamenting their own lack of strength and power (436-441) to avert the death doom that threatens Herakles' family (454f., 490ff., 501f.).

56 Mills 1997:131 n.7.

57 Meyer 1989.

When Herakles has arrived, the chorus of elder warriors entones a hymn of praise to youth, *hebe*, and an abomination of hateful *geras*, old age (637-668). They close their ode with a *kallinikon* song in honour of Herakles' excellence (*arete* 681, 697).⁵⁸ Shortly afterwards Lukos, the enemy, is killed (760).

As soon as this scene is over the goddesses Iris and Lyssa arrive and strike Herakles with mad rage (863, 931ff.). The consequences are terrible, when the hero attacks his wife and sons. In Homer Lyssa is the expression for war frenzy (Hom. *Il.* 9.237-39), when warriors are possessed with murderous rage killing all and everybody, going berserk.⁵⁹ This condition is opposed to the orderly march in the collective hoplite attack.

The whole scene then can be seen as an inversion of warrior practice: believing that he attacks the enemy, Herakles directs his martial violence towards his own *philoï*. In addition Herakles engages in an act of warrior frenzy, *lyssa*, the sort of irresistible murderous rage, which characterises Hektor and Achilles in the *Iliad* (9, 239, 395; 21, 542) slaughtering their enemies. Instead of fighting in orderly rank and file Herakles goes utterly berserk.

During the whole drama Herakles' duty to protect his family and kill his enemy are the principal values underlying the dramatic events. Lykos on the contrary evokes the sentiments of 'our enemy.'

In tragic violation of the positive values Herakles is first an absent warrior and thus unable to defend his *philoï*, and after that he behaves like an 'anti-warrior' attacking and killing the wrong enemy, his wife and children, and addition an 'anti-hoplite' raging in wild and murderous frenzy.

The interesting fact is that their death as well as Herakles' downfall is not presented as a domestic tragedy. When Herakles kills his sons, he believes he is attacking the family of Eurystheus, his arch-enemy and the verb that is used is the expression for killing in combat (*enairein* 866) His father describes Herakles' attack as a 'war that is no war' (*ἀπόλεμον ... πόλεμον* 1133).

We have, at last, to ask, in what sense Herakles can be said to have been a symbol of the hoplite warrior. His arms and weapons, belonging to mythical tradition, are of course the wrong ones.⁶⁰ At the end of the 5th century however more differentiated military techniques were introduced, and it seems that the drama turns around the abstract essence of warriorship: to protect one's polis possessing full masculine strength (*hebe*), the warrior's excellence (*arete*), and courage (*andreia*),

58 Pralon 1992.

59 Lincoln 1991, cf. Shay 1994:77-91, 218-19, Baudy 1993.

60 Sergent (1991) suggests that the bow is generically a weapon of marginal groups (*ephebes*, Scythians, Amazons) as well as the superhuman Herakles. Cf. Hamilton 1985.



Fig. 4 Kalyx-krater vase from Paestum signed by the painter Asteas, 4th century BC. Theatre scene of the madness of Herakles: Herakles throwing a child on a pyre. To the right his wife Megara tries to escape. In the upper gallery from the far left Mania (Madness), his companion Iolaos and his mother Alkmene are watching the scene. A.D. Trendall, Paestan Pottery. 31. pl. vii. Madrid. Museo Arqueológico nacional. nr. 11094. Photo Archivo fotográfico.

to fight in orderly attack, and stand firm in the face of death (1351, *cf.* Gibert 1997:252).

Xenophon reports a speech held by the Spartan king Arkhidamos, who exhorts his troops: 'Men, countrymen, let us be brave (*agathoi*) and look forward with steadfast eyes. Let us hand over our homeland to our descendants, as we received it from our fathers. Let us avoid feeling ashamed in front of our children, wives, aged parents (*gerontes*) and guest friends' (*xenoi*, Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.30). After the speech, Xenophon continues, thunder and lightning struck from heaven. There happened to be a shrine and a statue of Herakles on the right wing. As a consequence of all this the warriors were filled with such a fighting urge and courage that their commanders had a tough job holding them back.

Conclusion: the warrior as a key symbol?

The tragedies investigated in this paper do not represent the *polis* symbol or institution of the warrior in its positive image, an admirable paragon of male virtue. Nor do they present a moralistic warning against misbehaviour. The audience was instead presented with a *world-upside-down* staging absent, abnormal, or misguided warriors, which provoked its sense of the normal and natural order. The tragic events sent electrical charges of shock and horror through the theatre, revitalising the audience's cultural reflexes towards the correct order of warrior existence.

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Artémis, Pan et Marathon. Mythe, polythéisme et événement historique

Pierre Ellinger

LE PRINCIPAL TEXTE qui met en rapport Artémis et la bataille de Marathon est un passage de l'*Anabase* de Xénophon.¹ Ce serait même le premier, si l'on ne trouvait aussi une brève allusion dans les *Cavaliers* d'Aristophane, de 424, qui d'ailleurs le confirme pleinement.² Le contexte de l'évocation de Xénophon est dramatique. Les mercenaires grecs sont maintenant isolés au fond de la Mésopotamie. Leur employeur, Cyrus, a été tué quelques semaines auparavant, à la bataille de Counaxa. La tentative pour renverser le Grand Roi a totalement échoué, et il paraît clair que celui-ci ne cherche pas à reprendre les Grecs à son service, mais à les exterminer. La veille, leurs généraux ont été traîtreusement attirés dans un guet-apens, pris, et sans doute déjà massacrés. Le découragement, le désespoir de ne jamais revoir leur patrie règnent dans le camp des Grecs, entourés qu'ils sont d'ennemis et d'obstacles insurmontables. Mû dans la nuit par un rêve qui l'a sorti d'un sommeil plein d'inquiétude, Xénophon décide d'agir, rassemble les officiers survivants. De nouveaux généraux, dont lui-même, sont élus, et, au petit matin, dans sa plus belle armure, il tient, devant toute l'armée, le grand discours où il va évoquer Artémis. Il faut garder confiance. Car les Grecs sont fidèles à leurs serments, alors que les Perses viennent de les violer, avec le massacre des généraux. Les mercenaires seront aidés par les dieux, ces dieux 'qui sont capables en un clin d'œil de rendre les grands petits et de sauver les petits dans les pires dangers.'³ Et il ne fait guère de

1 Xen. *An.* 3.2.11-12. Artémis et Marathon: Parke 1977:54-55, Pritchett 1979:173-75, 232, Garland 1992:47-63, en particulier 55, Parker 1996:153. Sur la bataille elle-même: Burn 1984:236-57, Hammond 1973 et 1988, Green 1996:28-40, Evans 1993, Lazenby 1993:45-80, Doenges 1998. Le mythe de Marathon: Loraux 1973 et 1981:157-73, 406-11, Evans 1993:279-80, 303-07. Les présentes analyses prolongent celles que j'ai développées dans Ellinger 1993, en parallèle avec Jean-Pierre Vernant (1988, 1990:162-81).

2 Ar. *Eq.* 660 (confirmation du nombre de victimes à sacrifier; cf. Pritchett 1979:232).

3 Xen. *An.* 3.2.10.

doute que l'historien cite là la fameuse phrase finale de l'introduction d'Hérodote au récit des Guerres médiques:

'J'indiquerai celui qui, ... le premier, a pris l'initiative d'actes injustes envers les Grecs; et j'avancerai dans la suite de mon récit, parcourant indistinctement les grandes cités et les petites; car de celles qui jadis étaient grandes, la plupart sont devenues petites; et celles qui étaient grandes de mon temps étaient petites autrefois ...'⁴

Et, de fait, Xénophon enchaîne immédiatement en rappelant le souvenir des Guerres médiques, et, d'abord, de Marathon:

'Car je vais vous rappeler les dangers que coururent nos ancêtres, pour que vous sachiez combien il vous sied d'être des braves, et qu'avec l'aide des dieux les braves se sauvent même des périls les plus effrayants. Quand les Perses, en effet, et ceux qui les accompagnaient vinrent en nombre immense pour anéantir Athènes, les Athéniens osèrent leur tenir tête tout seuls, et ils les vainquirent. Ils avaient promis à Artémis qu'autant ils tueraient d'ennemis, autant ils sacrifieraient de jeunes chèvres (*khimairas*) à la déesse; et comme ils ne pouvaient pas s'en procurer en assez grand nombre, ils décidèrent d'en sacrifier cinq cents chaque année. Et on les sacrifie encore aujourd'hui.'⁵

Xénophon poursuit avec la deuxième Guerre médique:

'Plus tard, quand Xerxès eut réuni son innombrable armée et qu'il marcha contre l'Hellade, encore une fois nos ancêtres vainquirent les ancêtres de ces gens-ci et sur terre et sur mer Voilà les ancêtres dont vous êtes les fils.'⁶

Tel donc est le premier texte qui fasse mention avec autant de détails du fameux sacrifice à Artémis, commémorant la victoire de Marathon. La version de Plutarque n'en diffère que très peu:

'On raconte que les Athéniens avaient fait le vœu de sacrifier à Artémis Agrotéra autant de jeunes chèvres (*khimarous*) qu'ils abattraient de Barbares, mais qu'après la bataille, le nombre des morts se révélant incommensurable, ils demandèrent à la déesse dans une résolution l'autorisation de s'acquitter par un sacrifice annuel de cinq cents jeunes chèvres.'⁷

Pour Xénophon, on ne trouvait pas assez de chèvres pour faire face au nombre de Perses abattus (Hérodote l'évaluait à 6400). Chez Plutarque, il était de toute façon

4 Hdt. 1.5 (trad. Ph.-E. Legrand).

5 Xen. An. 3.2.11-12 (trad. P. Masqueray, légèrement modifiée). *Khimairai*: des chèvres 'qui n'ont connu qu'un hiver,' donc toutes du même âge (d'où la difficulté supplémentaire à en rassembler autant), de moins d'un an, et toutes *parthenoi*, en quelque sorte.

6 Xen. An. 3.2.13.

7 Plut. *De malignitate Herodoti* 862b (trad. G. Lachenaud). Plutarque reproche à Hérodote d'avoir, en donnant un nombre de morts, diminué la gloire des Athéniens. Il va de soi, qu'entre ne serait-ce que 490 et l'époque de Xénophon, le nombre de chèvres sacrifiées avait déjà dépassé tout chiffre de victimes possible!

impossible de compter les morts (selon certaines traditions, les Perses s'étaient noyés et avaient disparu en nombre dans le marécage⁸). D'où le remplacement du vœu initial par un sacrifice de cinq cents chèvres se répétant indéfiniment.

La fête avait lieu le 6 Boédromion, à Agrai, les 'Chasses,' au sanctuaire suburbain d'Artémis Agrotéra près de l'Ilissos, là où Artémis avait chassé, disaient les Athéniens, pour la première fois, quand elle était venue directement en Attique, depuis Délos, le lieu de sa naissance.⁹ Le 6 Boédromion, très probablement, n'était pas le jour anniversaire de la bataille, comme certains auteurs antiques et parfois modernes en sont venus à le dire,¹⁰ mais plutôt l'anniversaire du premier sacrifice d'action de grâce, après la victoire. Le 6 de chaque mois était de toute façon consacré traditionnellement à Artémis, étant considéré comme le jour de sa naissance, et s'était sans doute alors imposé pour la célébration.¹¹ Et, peut-être, comme on l'a souvent supposé,¹² une fête pour la déesse existait-elle déjà ce jour-là.

Mais, même dans ce cas, la fête d'après la bataille, avec l'énorme sacrifice et repas commun,¹³ devait être profondément différente. Elle était présidée par l'archonte-polémarque—le chef de l'armée à l'époque archaïque, et qui avait encore joué un rôle militaire de premier plan, sans doute pour la dernière fois, avec Callimachos, à Marathon, avant de le perdre ensuite complètement, au profit des stratèges, et ne plus garder que les fonctions religieuses liées à la guerre. Il sacrifiait, lors de la cérémonie, en même temps qu'à Artémis, à Enyalios, le dieu de la guerre.¹⁴ La fête comportait aussi une procession, et, au moins à certaines époques, les éphèbes y ont participé en armes, et y avaient un concours.¹⁵

8 Paus. 1.15.3 et 1.32.7.

9 Paus. 1.19.5-6. Date de la fête: Plut. *De glor. Ath.* 349e; *De malign. Herodoti* 862a. Deubner 1932:209, Mikalson 1975:50, Rhodes 1981:650 (à 58, 1).

10 Plut. *Cam.* 19.5, *De malign. Herodoti*, 861e, pour la bataille le 6 Boédromion.

11 Cf. Burn 1984:240-41, 256 (bataille le 16 de Metageitnion). N.G.L. Hammond, qui place la bataille le mois suivant, le 17 Boédromion, considère en conséquence le 6 comme le jour du vœu officiel (1973:215-17, 1988:507; suivi par Parke 1977:54-55). Mais il aurait fallu alors attendre presque un an pour remercier la déesse! Tout dépend ici d'une chronologie qui n'est toujours pas assurée. Cf. Pritchett 1974:116-20 et 1979:173, Lazenby 1993:53. Le vœu est envisagé, soit comme fait à froid, par l'assemblée (Hammond) ou au moment du départ pour Marathon (Jameson 1991:210-11: rassemblement au Lycée, en vue du sanctuaire d'Artémis Agrotéra), soit à chaud, au moment d'engager le combat (Lazenby 1993:75 n. 74 et déjà Burn, semble-t-il).

12 Burn 1984:240 n. 1, Hammond 1973:217, 1988:507, Parke 1977:54-55. Mais rien ne prouve que la fête ait déjà eu un caractère guerrier et ait été présidée par le polémarque.

13 Le plus ancien exemple attesté de la grande institution démocratique de la *dèmothoinia*, comme le remarque Parker 1996:153.

14 Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 58.1, avec le commentaire de Rhodes 1981:650.

15 *IG II²* 1028.8 (ii^e s. av. J.-C.) et les autres inscriptions dans Pélékidis 1962:219-20.

Si j'ai insisté à ce point sur le contexte de l'allusion de Xénophon, c'est qu'il est en général totalement négligé par les historiens des religions, qui se contentent de recueillir l'information.¹⁶ Quant aux commentateurs de l'historien lui-même, ils n'ont guère été inspirés par l'allusion à Artémis, qu'ils jugent sans doute une digression superflue, et ils trouveraient même l'évocation d'une victoire athénienne déplacée devant un public de mercenaires pour l'essentiel péloponnésiens.¹⁷ Je considérerais plutôt, pour ma part, que cette évocation de la déesse est un des sommets du discours et même de l'œuvre, en raison d'une part, mais je ne le développerai pas ici, du rapport que Xénophon entretient, en tant qu'homme et même en tant qu'historien, avec la déesse;¹⁸ et, d'autre part, je pense qu'elle se fonde sur un niveau, dirais-je, théologique général et commun à l'auteur et à ses auditeurs, et qui fait qu'il n'était pas absurde de souhaiter implicitement, en évoquant le vœu qui lui avait été fait par les Athéniens, qu'elle s'intéressât aussi aux mercenaires perdus au fond de l'Asie. Le parallélisme étroit, sur lequel est construit tout le passage, entre la situation de Xénophon et de ses compagnons et celle des Athéniens à Marathon, forme l'amorce d'une série qui permet de comprendre en quoi Artémis avait bien rapport non seulement à Marathon, mais à tout type de situation historique semblable.

Mais Artémis et Enyalios n'étaient pas les seules divinités honorées à Athènes pour Marathon. La bataille avait été aussi l'occasion de l'introduction du culte d'un nouveau dieu, Pan, à Athènes. C'est ce que raconte Hérodote, au livre vi, dans son grand récit de la bataille, antérieurement même à Xénophon— il ne parle pas d'Artémis ni du sacrifice commémoratif, Plutarque le lui reprochera d'ailleurs.¹⁹

Les stratèges athéniens, quand ils eurent appris la destruction totale d'Erétrie et le débarquement perse à Marathon, envoyèrent à Sparte demander de l'aide, un héraut, un 'hémérodrome,' c'est-à-dire un coureur de longue distance spécialisé, nommé Philippidès. Cet homme parcourut en moins de deux jours la longue route entre Athènes et Sparte et obtint la fameuse réponse que les Lacédémoniens viendraient, mais qu'ils ne pourraient pas partir avant la pleine lune, c'est-à-dire qu'ils arriveraient très probablement trop tard. Autrement dit un message négatif, ou pire, brouillé et contradictoire.

Or cet homme, porteur d'un tel message, sur la route du retour—ce n'est pas dit explicitement, mais tous s'accordent à penser que c'est le plus vraisemblable dans le récit²⁰—fit la rencontre du dieu Pan:

16 Seul l'évoque, parmi les historiens, A.R. Burn (1984:256, n. 51), avec son acuité habituelle.

17 Cf. la note de P. Masqueray dans son édition de l'*Anabase* de la C.U.F. (1930) i:173; Delebecque 1957:96, 201, 204 (déjà REG, 59-60, 1946-47:78, 104); suivis par Loraux 1981:134-35, 399 n. 5.

18 Voir en dernier lieu, Ragone 1996a et b.

19 Hdt. 6.105-106; Plut. *De malign. Herodoti* 862a-b.

‘Cet homme d’après ce qu’il raconta lui-même et rapporta aux Athéniens, fit dans la région du mont Parthénion, au dessus de Tégée, la rencontre de Pan; Pan l’appela à haute voix par son nom, Philippidès, et il lui ordonna de demander de sa part aux Athéniens pourquoi ils ne prenaient de lui aucun soin, alors qu’il leur voulait du bien, qu’il leur avait rendu déjà des services en maintes circonstances et leur en rendrait encore. Les Athéniens, quand leurs affaires furent mises sur un bon pied, convaincus de la véracité de ce récit, établirent au bas de l’Acropole un sanctuaire de Pan, et, depuis le message qu’ils ont reçu, ils se rendent le dieu propice par des sacrifices annuels et une course aux flambeaux.’²¹

Là encore, on s’est interrogé sur le pourquoi et la manière de l’intervention de Pan. Mais il ne me semble pas, malgré les progrès indéniables faits dans cette direction, de Philippe Borgeaud à Robert Garland et Robert Parker,²² que l’on soit encore parvenu à une réponse totalement satisfaisante. On n’a pas répondu non plus à la question: pourquoi deux divinités pour un même événement? Qu’est-ce qui rapproche leur action en l’occurrence? Qu’est-ce qui la différencie? Pour Artémis, j’ai esquissé, dans mes travaux antérieurs, et en même temps que Jean-Pierre Vernant,²³ une ligne d’approche que je voudrais reprendre ici, en l’appliquant spécialement au cas de Marathon—il sera aussi question de Salamine—, et pour Pan je voudrais proposer quelques hypothèses nouvelles.

J’ai insisté sur le parallèle tracé, dans le discours de Xénophon, entre la situation présente et celle passée de Marathon. Résumons-en les traits principaux: le sacrilège des Barbares qui ont violé leurs serments et l’injustice d’une agression qui vise à une extermination totale. Le caractère effrayant du péril: *phobos* est un des termes clefs du récit.²⁴ La disproportion écrasante des forces: les Perses ‘vinrent en nombre immense (*pamplèthei stolôi*) pour anéantir Athènes;’ Xerxès et ‘son innombrable armée’ (*tèn anarithmèton stratian*),²⁵ de même les Grecs de l’*Anabase* font face à des adversaires ‘beaucoup plus nombreux,’ éventuellement qualifiés eux

20 Démonstration fort convaincante de R. Garland (1992:49 n. 2). La tradition conservée par la *Souda*, s.v. *Hippias* 2, indiquait explicitement que c’est pendant le voyage de retour (*epanionti*) que Pan apparut à Philippidès. Paysage de la rencontre: Jost 1985:158-59, 162-64, 458, 472-73. Sur son nom (parfois Pheidippidès), sa course, et les autres traditions rassemblées ultérieurement autour de lui, cf. Lazenby 1993:52-53.

21 Hdt. 6.105 (traduction Ph.-E. Legrand).

22 Borgeaud 1979:146-47, 195-200, Garland 1992:47-63, Parker 1996:163-68.

23 Cf. ci-dessus n. 1.

24 Cf. Xen. *An.* 3.1.12 et 18; 3.2.16.

25 Xen. *An.* 3.1.11 et 13. Sur ce *topos*, voir aussi Simonide, fr. 90 Bergk; Hdt. 6.109.1 et 112.7, 9.27; Lys. *Epitaphios*, 20-21, 23-24, 27, 36, 40-41; Isoc. *Paneg.* 86, 93 (même expression: *stratias anarithmètou*); Pl. *Menex.* 239e-240a, 241a-c. Xénophon croise un thème obligé de l’oraison funèbre, comme l’a bien montré N. Loraux (1973:19-20; 1981:134, 158-59).

aussi de 'multitude innombrable' (*plèthos ametron*).²⁶ Or toute cette thématique se retrouve trait pour trait dans un nombre considérable de récits d'événements eux aussi mis en rapport avec Artémis. De ce point de vue, Marathon n'est pas isolée, mais fait partie d'une abondante série qui recouvre non seulement les Guerres médiques, mais les périodes antérieures et postérieures. Marathon d'ailleurs n'était pas seulement célébrée par le grand sacrifice à Artémis Agrotéra, mais aussi, sur l'agora même d'Athènes, par un culte en l'honneur d'Eukléia ('La Belle Gloire'), qui en d'autres lieux est aussi une épiclèse de la déesse.²⁷ Pour la suite du conflit, non seulement la bataille navale du Cap Artémision était-elle commémorée, comme on pouvait s'y attendre, dans un sanctuaire d'Artémis, celui d'Artémis Prosèda sur le cap en question,²⁸ mais celle de Salamine aussi, à Mounychie, au sanctuaire d'Artémis Mounychia à la pointe du port de guerre,²⁹ et c'est Artémis Aristoboulè qu'honora, à titre personnel, le général vainqueur, Thémistocle, pour lui avoir inspiré son fameux stratagème.³⁰ Hors d'Attique, on voit, avant Platées, les voisins des Athéniens, les Mégariens, attribuer à leur Artémis Sôteira ('Qui sauve') une victoire miraculeuse sur un détachement de cavaliers et d'archers perses qui avait ravagé leur territoire.³¹ A Platées même, pour la victoire décisive, on instituera le double culte de Zeus libérateur (Eleuthérios) et justement d'Artémis Eukléia.³²

On pourrait croire que la déesse se serait spécialisée, en raison de son rapport à la sauvagerie, dans la lutte contre les Barbares, les Perses. Mais la série, comme on l'a dit, s'étend aussi bien sur l'époque antérieure et postérieure, et pour des adversaires qui ne sont certes pas tous des Barbares. Pour l'époque antérieure aux Guerres médiques, elle va jusqu'aux temps mythiques d'avant la guerre de Troie: Artémis Agrotéra sauve Aigeira d'Achaïe des Sicyoniens;³³ Artémis Eukléia, honorée, au moins dès l'époque classique, sur l'agora de Thèbes, libère, avec Héraclès, la cité de l'oppression des Phlégyens d'Orchomène.³⁴ Bien sûr, ces récits, dont la date de formation n'est pas souvent connue, pourraient être tardifs. Mais c'est aussi Artémis qui, dans la version d'Eschyle, exige en paiement de la ruine de Troie

26 Xen. *An.* 3.2.14 et 16.

27 Paus. 1.14, 5. Cf. Plut. *Arist.* 20.6-8; Braund 1980, Parker 1996:234.

28 Plut. *Them.* 8; *De malign. Herodoti* 867f. Les stèles qui y commémoraient l'ensemble des victoires sur les Mèdes, prenaient, frottées, la couleur et l'odeur du safran, signe éclatant là encore de gloire, de *kleos* (Svenbro 1988:101).

29 Plut. *De glor. Ath.* 349f; *Lys.* 15.1.

30 Plut. *Them.* 22.2-3; *De malign. Herodoti* 869 c-d. Cf. ci-dessous, p. 325-28.

31 Paus. 1.40.2-3; 1.44. 4; Ellinger 1993:224-28.

32 Plut. *Arist.* 20.6-7; Schachter 1981:102, 106.

33 Paus. 7.26.1-3; Ellinger 1993:222-24.

le sacrifice d'Iphigénie,³⁵ et c'est dans la nuit de sa fête, ce que l'on sait en général moins, que la ville est prise.³⁶ Dans les légendes des Phocidiens, qui remontent, elles, certainement, pour partie, à l'époque archaïque, c'est Artémis Elaphébolos, la déesse du sanctuaire national de l'*ethnos*, à Hyampolis, qui a empêché la disparition de ce dernier, voulue par ses grands voisins du Nord, les Thessaliens.³⁷ Et, à l'inverse, la principale destruction d'un Etat grec pour l'époque archaïque, celle de la Messénie par les Lacédémoniens, est attribuée à la colère de la déesse, qui venge le sacrilège commis en son sanctuaire de Limnai (Artémis Limnatis), à la frontière des deux peuples, le viol de toute une classe d'âge de jeunes filles spartiates.³⁸

La série se prolonge au delà des guerres médiques, montrant une tradition qui ne cesse d'être vivante et inventive. Les récits de la fameuse victoire thébaine de Leuctres, en 371, qui met fin à la suprématie spartiate en Grèce, se modèlent implicitement sur les mêmes schèmes, avec sacrilège et jeunes filles violées; le sacrifice humain d'une autre jeune fille est envisagé; les chèvres du troupeau sacrificiel spartiate, les victimes pour Artémis, sont égorgées par les loups à la veille du combat, et une herbe et des broussailles sauvages poussent sur la tête de la statue à Delphes du principal artisan de l'hégémonie spartiate, le vainqueur de la guerre du Péloponnèse, Lysandre.³⁹ Artémis continuera par la suite, jusqu'en pleine époque hellénistique, à sauver les cités. Elle les préserve de la régression à une férocité digne de temps antérieurs, comme à Pallène d'Achaïe, victime des Etoliens en 241,⁴⁰ et elle s'engage contre les dernières innovations de l'art militaire, les nouvelles méthodes de la poliorcétique macédonienne: elle sauve Byzance du siège de Philippe II, dès 340, et Cnide de celui de Philippe V, en 201.⁴¹ Pour terminer, rappelons que dans la légende d'Alexandre, c'est le jour d'Artémis, le 6, qu'il naît, le jour fameux où brûle son immense temple à Ephèse, dont l'incendie est considéré comme le signe de la destruction de l'Empire perse⁴²—et certains esprits systéma-

34 Paus. 9.7.1-2; Schachter 1981:35, 104. Dans Soph. *OT* 160-167, l'Artémis Eukléia de l'agora est invoquée contre le fléau, la peste, qui menace la cité, l'ayant déjà sauvée du désastre par le passé. Dans Aesch. *Sept.* 449-50, Artémis Prostataira doit s'opposer à Capanée, qui se vante d'incendier la ville.

35 Aesch. *Ag.* 104-59; cf. Vidal-Naquet 1972:140-48 et Schnapp 1997:74-80, sur la 'chasse à la ville.'

36 Eur. *Tro.* 551-55; cf. *Hec.* 914 et 935-36; *Petite Iliade*, fr. 12 Allen (à minuit, à la pleine lune).

37 Plut. *De mul. virt.* 244 b-e; Paus. 10.1.7-9; Ellinger 1993.

38 Paus. 4.4.1-3; Strabon 6.3.3; Ellinger 1993:41-44, 261-63, 302-9.

39 Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.7; Plut. *Pel.* 20-22 et *Am. narr.* 773b-774d (filles de Skédasos); Paus. 9.13.4 (chèvres et loups); Callisthène, *FGrH* 124 fr. 22 (Cic. *Div.* 1.75); Plut. *De Pyth. or.* 397f (statue de Lysandre).

40 Plut. *Arat.* 31-32.

41 Steph. Byz. *s.v. Bosporos*; Hsch. *Mil. FGrH* 390 fr. 1, 26-27 (Byzance); Pugliese Carratelli 1987 (Cnide), Ellinger 1993:290-91.

tiques iront jusqu'à placer un 6, et toujours du même mois, autant d'événements de ce genre qu'il leur sera possible: la commémoration de Marathon, l'Artémision, Platées et Mycale, la destruction des armées perses à Arbèles, en 331, et la destitution de Darius iii, pour finir par la mort d'Alexandre lui-même!⁴³

Devant une série aussi massive, toute explication partielle ou fortuite (par exemple par le lieu: tel cap ou détroit voué à Artémis, ou par le temps de l'événement, le 6, la nuit ou la pleine lune⁴⁴) ne saurait être qu'insuffisante. Une telle ligne de raisonnement oublie qu'une figure divine est une réalité complexe qui se déploie sur de multiples plans, corrélés entre eux par tout un jeu de correspondances, d'analogies et de surdéterminations. Il faut plutôt s'orienter vers une explication beaucoup plus globale, plus synthétique, mais où s'intègrent, en même temps, les différents détails.

En fait, ce qui est commun et dominant dans tous ces cas, c'est la caractéristique essentielle même de l'événement historique. A chaque fois, il s'agit de la menace de la destruction totale pour une cité, un peuple, un Etat. Et c'est pour cela qu'Artémis intervient, selon les circonstances, pour préserver les uns de cette destruction totale ou l'infliger aux autres. Elle intervient dans le cadre de ce que j'ai proposé d'appeler les 'guerres d'anéantissement,' c'est-à-dire une forme de guerre qui est opposée aux normes qui se sont mises en place aux époques archaïque et classique, opposée à la stratégie traditionnelle de la guerre hoplitique, où l'on ne vise pas à la destruction totale de l'armée de l'adversaire et encore moins à celle de sa cité. Cette guerre est perçue aussi comme une forme de transgression, d'*hubris*, de démesure qui s'oppose à la *dikè*, la justice. Et cette *hubris* croit trouver sa toute-puissance dans une supériorité écrasante, qu'elle soit numérique ou qu'elle tienne —mais souvent les deux se combinent—aux armes et aux méthodes de guerre employées, cavalerie, moyens poliorcétiques.⁴⁵ Tout cela, associé au thème de l'anéantissement, revient comme un *leitmotiv*, répété, presque mot pour mot, de texte en texte. Deux exemples suffiront, pour ne pas entrer dans une énumération fastidieuse, pris presque au hasard, le premier et le dernier de notre liste, comme l'envers et l'endroit. Xénophon: 'Quand les Perses et ceux qui les accompagnaient vinrent en nombre immense pour anéantir Athènes ...;' Elien, dans l'*Histoire variée*: 'Alexandre de Macédoine, le fils de Philippe, lui aussi, dit-on, a anéanti ces dizaines et dizaines de milliers de barbares le sixième jour du début de ce mois, date à laquelle il destitua Darius.'⁴⁶

42 Plut. *Alex.* 3,5-7; Cic. *Div.* 1,47; Ael. *VH* 2,25.

43 Ael. *VH* 2,25 (le mois étant devenu celui de Thargelion pour la circonstance).

44 Ainsi, par exemple, Piccirilli 1981a:146-47, Hammond 1973:215-17 et 1988:511, 517, Garland 1992:55, 72, 75-76, Parker 1996:155, n. 10, Jameson 1991:210-11.

45 Ellinger 1993:332-37, Vernant 1988.

Une objection pourrait être faite: Artémis intervient aussi dans la guerre ordinaire. C'est à elle, à Artémis Agrotéra précisément, que le général spartiate sacrifiait sur le front des troupes une *khimaira*, une jeune chèvre, pour obtenir l'autorisation divine d'engager la bataille,⁴⁷ c'est-à-dire la même victime que les Athéniens promettaient à la même divinité à Marathon. Mais c'est justement, comme l'a bien montré J.-P. Vernant,⁴⁸ que les frontières ne sont pas si étanches ni si assurées par avance entre un affrontement qui devrait se dérouler selon les normes et celui qui leur échappe. Le combat des phalanges hoplitiques n'est pas ce tournoi ludique et quelque peu irréel que l'on parfois voulu faire croire. Il est, on l'a encore bien rappelé récemment,⁴⁹ une assez sanglante boucherie, le lieu où Arès, ce dieu fou et détesté qui combat dans les deux camps à la fois,⁵⁰ continue à régner en maître. Mais entre un combat sanglant, mais contenu entre certaines limites et suivi d'un règlement politique, et un carnage complet ou la destruction d'une cité, il y a plus qu'une nuance. Et c'est pour éviter que l'un ne dérape dans l'autre que l'on s'adressait à Artémis, en particulier ces Spartiates si soucieux, et surtout à la guerre, que tout se déroule en un ordre parfait.

Evidemment, plus grands étaient l'enjeu, la menace et le risque, plus les enchères montaient. A Platées, la bataille décisive contre les Perses, le général spartiate, chef de toute l'armée grecque, sacrifie chèvres sur chèvres, en larmes, sans obtenir le signe attendu, et les hommes tombent autour de lui, les uns après les autres, sous les traits des Perses, sans un geste pour se défendre.⁵¹ A Leuctres rôde le fantasme du sacrifice d'Iphigénie.⁵² Mais la règle générale, pour toutes ces victoires exceptionnelles, c'est, après coup, la fondation d'un culte en l'honneur de la déesse, les 500 chèvres de Marathon ou les Elaphébolia d'Hyampolis.

Comment Artémis agit-elle en la circonstance pour que le bon côté l'emporte? Essentiellement de deux manières. Et c'est ce que montrent, parmi bien d'autres, les récits phocidiens, qui fonctionnent comme un parfait manuel de la guerre d'anéantissement, explorant avec une rigueur quasi mathématique les différentes alternatives, dévoilant les bonnes et les mauvaises solutions. Pour contrebalancer et réduire à néant la supériorité terrifiante de l'agresseur, ou bien la déesse insuffle

46 Xen. *An.* 3.2.11-12; Ael. *VH* 2.25.

47 Xen, *Lac.* 13, 8; *Hell.* 4.2.20; Plut. *Lyc.* 22.4-6; cf. Pritchett 1979:83-84.

48 Vernant 1988:230-39.

49 Hanson 1989.

50 Hom. *Il.* 5.831, 889-98. Cf. Loraux 1986:347-48, et la thèse de doctorat de Bernard Mezzadri, 'Autour d'Arès. Quelques aspects du dieu de la guerre et de son domaine en Grèce ancienne,' Paris, *EPHE* v^e section, 1993. Burkert 1985:169-70, minimise à l'excès le rôle d'Arès à l'époque classique.

51 Plut. *Arist.* 17.7-18.2 (cf. Hdt. 9.61); Detienne et Svenbro 1979:231-32, Vernant 1988:233-34.

52 Plut. *Pel.* 21-22 (cf. 21.4).

en ses protégés une énergie désespérée, ou bien elle leur inspire des ruses qui sont des leurres où se piège la démesure, l'*hubris* de l'adversaire, quand elle-même, de sa lumière donnée ou ôtée, ne dissipe ou au contraire ne jette la confusion, illumine ou aveugle, au propre comme au figuré. De la sorte, elle pourrait paraître mettre en œuvre le vieux couple de la force et de la ruse, de *biè* et de *mètis*, mais, en réalité, elle les pousse l'une et l'autre à un tel paroxysme qu'elle en change la configuration.⁵³ La force écrasante est du côté de l'autre; du côté d'Artémis et des siens, les maîtres mots sont audace et énergie du désespoir, *tolma*, *tharsos*, *aponoia*, des notions qui en des contextes plus ordinaires pourraient facilement basculer du côté de la folie ou de la rage, *mania* ou *lussa*. Quant à ses ruses, ce sont moins les nœuds, les liens et les filets de la *mètis* que des pièges interprétatifs, plus proches dans le domaine de l'action des leurres de mots que tend, dans ses oracles, son jumeau Apollon à la folie, là encore, des hommes d'*hubris*, dont il révèle l'aveuglement.⁵⁴ Ainsi se découpe un domaine d'action spécifique et distinct de la déesse, à la frontière tout à la fois de ceux d'Arès, d'Athéna et d'Apollon.

De ce point de vue, Marathon appartient plutôt au premier volet de ce diptyque dont l'exemple le plus accompli, et en même temps quelque peu fantastique,⁵⁵ est la Légende phocidienne du Désespoir, de l'*Aponoia*, l'*aition* de la fondation des Elaphébolia d'Hyampolis: les Phocidiens rassemblent femmes et enfants, avec toutes les richesses du pays, sur un immense bûcher, décidés en cas de défaite à les égorger comme des victimes sacrificielles et à tout faire brûler en même temps que les images de leurs dieux qui les auraient abandonnés. 'Ayant devant les yeux ce qu'ils avaient décidé et voyant que leur salut était totalement incertain, ils furent capables de toutes les audaces et remportèrent la plus fameuse victoire de ce temps.⁵⁶ Plutarque l'égalera, d'ailleurs, à Marathon et à Leuctres.⁵⁷ Certes, les récits de Marathon n'atteignent pas à de telles improbables extrémités, encore que le monstrueux sacrifice promis à Artémis, et même celui effectivement mis en œuvre chaque année, aillent fort loin en ce sens, dans les limites du réel. Mais ils me paraissent eux aussi verser du côté de cette folie positive avec la fameuse course des hoplites athéniens—qui n'est en fait guère plus croyable dans la longueur des huit stades que la tradition lui assigne:

53 La question d'un rapport possible entre Artémis et la *mètis* a été posée pour la première fois par Piccirilli (1981a et b).

54 Sur tout ceci, démonstrations détaillées dans Ellinger 1993: 13-93, 199-232 (ruses), 233-40, 290-310, Vernant 1988:224-29.

55 Ce qui ne veut pas dire que je dénie la possibilité de suicides collectifs réels ni d'un arrière-plan historique de la 'Légende' phocidienne, comme voudrait absolument me le faire dire Pritchett (1996:93-147; en particulier: 93-105, 135, 146-47).

56 Paus. 10.1.9; Plut. *De mul. virt.* 244 b-e; Ellinger 1993:233-36.

57 Plut. *Non posse suaviter vivi* ... 1099 s.

‘Lorsque les troupes eurent pris leurs positions et que les sacrifices donnèrent de bons présages, les Athéniens, aussitôt donné le signal de l’attaque, se lancèrent au pas de course contre les Barbares; l’intervalle qui les en séparait n’était pas de moins de huit stades. Les Perses, quand ils les virent arriver sur eux en courant, se préparèrent à les recevoir; constatant qu’ils étaient peu nombreux et que, malgré cela, ils se lançaient au pas de course, sans cavalerie, sans archers, ils les crurent atteints de *folie, d’une folie qui causerait leur perte totale (manièn ... kai pagkhu olethrièn)*. C’était l’idée que se faisaient les Barbares; mais les Athéniens, après qu’ils eurent, en rangs serrés, pris contact avec eux, combattirent de façon mémorable.’⁵⁸

A défaut du terme *aponoia*, c’est bien son correspondant négatif *manièn* qui est employé pour qualifier l’action des Athéniens, dans l’idée erronée que s’en font les Perses, c’est-à-dire celle que la tradition, grecque, leur attribue. Et c’est cette folie positive, cette exaltation sur laquelle a insisté à juste titre Robert Garland, qui permet de vaincre la terreur pour tous les autres Grecs insurmontable que provoquait l’ennemi perse.⁵⁹ Et ici aussi, dans le récit d’Hérodote comme plus tard pour Xénon, *phobos* est bien le terme clef:

‘Ils furent en effet, autant que nous sachions, les premiers de tous les Grecs qui allèrent à l’ennemi en courant, les premiers à supporter la vue de l’équipement des Mèdes et d’hommes portant cet équipement, alors que, jusque-là, rien qu’à entendre le nom des Mèdes, les Grecs étaient pris de peur (*phobos*).’⁶⁰

Les récits sur Marathon nous conduisent, donc, je crois, du côté de cette Artémis de l’*aponoia*, et l’on comprend mieux dès lors qu’elle soit honorée aux côtés du dieu fou de la mêlée furieuse, Enyalios.

Au contraire, la tradition sur l’autre grande victoire des Athéniens, la rivale de Marathon, Salamine, a utilisé l’autre versant du mode d’action guerrier de la déesse, celle de la ruse, qui guide et éclaire l’esprit de ses protégés, celle que Thémistocle avait nommée la ‘Meilleure Conseillère,’ l’Aristoboulè. Très curieusement, les récits serrent ici au plus près les cas d’école phocidiens, et partagent avec

58 Hdt. 6.112 (trad. Ph.-E. Legrand). Cf. Donlan et Thompson 1976, 1978-1979. La course, dont la longueur a été par la suite exagérée par la tradition, avait, notent-ils, un triple but: réduire le temps où les Athéniens seraient la cible des archers perses, augmenter leur puissance de choc, enfin leur donner ‘a psychological lift,’ capable de leur faire surmonter la terreur perse.

59 Garland 1992:53-54, développant l’analyse de Donlan et Thompson; il fait cependant fausse route en attribuant l’exaltation des Athéniens à l’action du dieu Pan, et en réduisant Artémis à un rôle purement circonstanciel (celui du coucher précoce de la lune dans le retard pris par la cavalerie perse pour revenir sur le champ de bataille, du moins selon la reconstitution fort controversée de Hammond 1973:215-17, 1988:511, 517. Le parallèle le plus proche serait alors l’intervention d’Artémis en faveur des Mégariens en 479 [Paus. 1.40.2-3; 1.44.4], elle-même à interpréter dans le cadre du mode d’action global de la déesse; cf. Ellinger 1993:224-28).

60 Hdt. 6.112.

eux les mêmes problématiques. Ils explorent les mêmes parades à la guerre d'anéantissement, la recherche d'une protection parfaite de la *khôra* et son contraire, l'évacuation (*hupekthesis*), les combats en des lieux qui sont à la fois des passages obligés et des points extrêmes du territoire; ils prônent la même morale qui stigmatise l'évitement du risque, qui démontre l'impossibilité d'une défense parfaitement étanche comme d'un contrôle absolu des situations.⁶¹ Ainsi Thémistocle s'évertue-t-il à montrer l'inefficacité de la stratégie des Péloponnésiens, qui voudraient se croire à l'abri derrière le double verrou du mur de l'Isthme et de la route vertigineuse des falaises skironiennes qu'ils avaient effondrée dans la mer;⁶² de même les antiques légendes phocidiennes avaient montré l'inefficacité d'une défense prétendument infranchissable en avant du territoire, dans leur cas aux Thermopyles: les Phocidiens avaient à la fois construit un mur barrant la passe et détourné par devant lui l'eau des sources chaudes, croyant interdire toute approche.⁶³ Au contraire, les Grecs l'emporteront à Salamine en forçant les Perses à combattre dans le détroit, de même que les Phocidiens, recourant à un stratagème point pour point opposé au dispositif qui leur avait précédemment si mal réussi aux Thermopyles, l'avaient emporté sur la cavalerie thessalienne en la poussant à les affronter dans la passe d'Hyampolis, au plus proche de leur pays: ils s'étaient offerts eux-mêmes comme appât et comme leurre à sa charge, derrière le piège qu'ils avaient dissimulé, une tranchée remplie de jarres aux larges ouvertures dirigées vers le haut, et rendues invisibles par une couche de terre.⁶⁴ Mais ici, sans conteste, c'est la ruse du stratège athénien qui dépasse dans l'audace et l'énormité du risque pris tout précédent imaginable, quand en prévenant Xerxès que les Grecs vont fuir, à la fois il le piège dans son désir et sa certitude de vaincre, et contraint, sans plus aucune échappatoire possible, ses compatriotes à combattre. Mais le mécanisme psychologique de la ruse reste le même, jouant de ce 'fol espoir,' de ce 'désir furieux' de l'*hubris* de 'tout engloutir,' comme le disait si bien l'oracle de Bacis donné aux Athéniens pour Salamine, que cite Hérodote.⁶⁵

Ces deux orientations de l'action d'Artémis, du côté de l'énergie du désespoir et du côté de ces pièges à *hubris* sont en fait logiquement équivalente—bonne folie et pièges pour une mauvaise folie—et elles se réunissent autour d'une même problématique du risque et de l'audace.⁶⁶ Mais il est intéressant aussi de voir qu'elles

61 Ellinger 1993:199-222.

62 Hdt. 8.40.71, 74.

63 Hdt. 7.176 et 215. Le parallélisme entre l'antique stratégie des Phocidiens aux Thermopyles et celle des Péloponnésiens à l'Isthme va même, chez Hérodote, jusqu'à une étroite similitude verbale; comparer 7.176 et 8.71 (*cf.* aussi 8.40). Entre les deux épisodes, la décision des Grecs de tenir en 480 les Thermopyles représente le lien évident, en même temps qu'elle est l'occasion du rappel des anciennes traditions.

64 Hdt. 8.28; Paus. 10.1.3; Ellinger 1993:205-12.

ont pu être utilisées et mises en opposition, à l'intérieur d'une même cité, par deux traditions rivales et idéologiquement concurrentes. La 'tradition de l'hoplite athénien'⁶⁷ a manifestement préféré cette Artémis Agrotéra, terrienne, de l'énergie du désespoir, proche d'Arès, tandis que la tradition 'navale' des démocrates impérialistes s'est identifiée à cette Artémis des rivages marins, Mounychia, protectrice du port de guerre, *limenoskopos*,⁶⁸ qui éclairait de ses lumières, illuminait ceux qui valorisaient au plus haut point l'intelligence des situations, la faculté de *sunesis*. Une Artémis qui, par ses ruses, paraît certes proche d'Athéna, mais dont, il faut le redire, l'action va en réalité bien au-delà des simples *mèkhanai* de la *mètis*, du pur jeu des forces et de leur retournement, en ce qu'un de ses ressorts essentiels, le principal recours contre la terreur, est la prise en considération de la justice ou de l'injustice de la cause, de la supériorité que confère le respect de la justice et des limites à observer, des porte-à-faux et des faux pas auxquels son *hubris* entraînera l'ennemi. C'est tout cela qui justifie la confiance en l'audace qu'elle appelle à déployer.⁶⁹ L'efficace de ces ruses réside en une juste compréhension du rapport à soi-même, aux autres et aux dieux, et elles paraissent en conséquence beaucoup plus proches du domaine d'Apollon et de l'activité divinatoire. Rien d'étonnant alors que ceux qui les mettent en œuvre soient, pour les Phocidiens, un devin,⁷⁰ pour les Athéniens, un lecteur d'oracle plus avisé que les experts en la matière (le fameux 'rempart de bois'). Un homme (je cite Thucydide) qui 'excellait à la fois pour se faire, dans les problèmes immédiats, l'avis le meilleur, grâce à la réflexion la plus brève (*elakhistès boulès*), et, relativement à l'avenir, la plus juste idée (*aristos eikastès*) sur les perspectives les plus étendues.' Certes, les autres, et sans doute d'abord ses ennemis, le surnommaient-ils Ulysse, mais on sera probablement plus

65 Hdt. 8.77: 'Lorsqu'Artémis au glaive d'or verra son saint rivage relié par les navires à Kynosoura au milieu des flots, lorsque dans leur fol espoir (*elpidi mainomenèi*) ils auront saccagé la brillante Athènes, alors la divine *Dikè* étouffera le violent *Koros* (Orgueil) fils d'*Hubris*, aux furieux désirs, pensant qu'il engloutira tout d'un seul coup (*dokeunt' hama piesthai*). Mettre en parallèle le *hós anarpasomenoi* des Thessaliens, 'pensant les anéantir,' en 8.28. Egalemeut Aesch. *Pers.* 355-62, 372-73.

66 Sur les risques pris par les Athéniens à Marathon, cf. Evans 1993:286-87, 290n.48, 301, 307.

67 Cf. Vidal-Naquet 1983:125-49.

68 Callim. *Hymn.* 3.259; Ellinger 1993:230; 1997:859-61; Palaiokrassa 1991:33-38.

69 Dans l'*Hymne* que lui consacre Callimaque (3.120-28), Artémis prend pour cible suprême de son arc la cité des hommes injustes (avec une description du *loimos* qui reprend trait pour trait celle des effets de la justice et de l'injustice royale chez Homère [*Od.* 19.109-14] et Hésiode [*Op.* 225-51]).

70 Tellias d'Elis: lui est attribuée en particulier la ruse des Trois-cents Choisis phocidiens blanchis au gypse sous la pleine lune qui doit son succès à la fausse interprétation des Thessaliens, les prenant pour des êtres surnaturels (Hdt. 8.27; Paus. 10.1.11; Ellinger 1993:15-16, 199-204, 220-22). Là aussi, les associations artémisiaques sont évidentes, mais on aurait tort de les réduire, de même que pour Salamine, à une simple question de nuit et de lune.

avisé à le suivre lui-même, qui préférerait rapporter ses talents à cette Artémis *Aristoboulè* dont l'épiclèse semble transparaître jusque dans le portrait que dresse de lui son admirateur, Thucydide.⁷¹ Le sommet de cette tradition démocratique sera atteint quand Artémis se faisant directement Phosphoros, celle qui éclaire dans la nuit de la confusion, de l'injustice et de la tyrannie, en 403, faisant apparaître une lumière devant eux, guidera hors des routes dans la tempête, les exilés, partisans de Thrasybule, des montagnes de Phylè à son autel de Mounychie, afin de rétablir la démocratie et l'Empire.⁷² Mais il est douteux que le Xénophon de Counaxa, l'ancien cavalier des Trente, ait beaucoup apprécié, s'il l'a jamais connu, ce mythe, qui attribuait à sa déesse favorite le succès miraculeux de l'Anabase de Thrasybule, qui lui avait valu son exil.

Pour en revenir à notre point de départ et à cette évocation en Mésopotamie de l'Artémis Agrotéra de Marathon, elle n'était peut-être pas si déplacée, même devant un auditoire de mercenaires péloponnésiens. C'est elle en tout cas, l'Agrotéra spartiate et athénienne tout à la fois, qu'invoque Aristophane comme signe de paix et d'alliance retrouvée avec Sparte, dans *Lysistrata*, en 412, à la veille du premier coup d'Etat oligarchique des amis de Xénophon, rappelant, en dialecte laconien, le souvenir des combats communs. Hoplites et marins sont enfin réunis, dans le souvenir du coude à coude des Thermopyles et de l'Artémision, et, par un tour de force métaphorique, se trouvent identifiés, sous la même image héroïque du sanglier de l'épopée, les compagnons de Léonidas et les équipages athéniens avec leurs navires aux proues en forme de hure—mais Salamine est une fois de plus opportunément oubliée:

'Envoie à ton jeune chanteur, Mnémoné (*Mnamona*), ta Muse (*Môa*) qui connaît nos exploits et ceux des Athéniens, quand ceux-ci, à l'Artémision, se ruaient sur les vaisseaux, pareils à des sangliers (*sueikeloi*), et qu'ils vainquirent les Mèdes. Et nous, Léonidas nous conduisait comme des porcs sauvages, je pense, aiguisant leurs défenses. Abondante sur nos joues moussait l'écume, abondante en même temps elle décollait de nos jambes. Car les guerriers n'étaient pas moins nombreux que les grains de sable du côté des Perses.

71 Hdt. 7.141-43 (oracle du rempart de bois); Thuc. 1.138.3; Plut. *De malign. Herodoti* 869f (Ulysse). Depuis Amandry 1967:275, le rapport privilégié de Thémistocle à l'Artémis Aristoboulè (et non à l'Athéna de la *mêtis*, comme l'a bien vu Piccirilli 1981a: 143-56) n'a cessé d'être source de perplexité: cf. Garland 1992:73-81; Parker 1996:155. Première présentation de ces hypothèses: Ellinger 1984:63-67.

72 Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1.163.1-3; cf. Ellinger 1993:228-32. La tradition voulait aussi que Lysandre ait exigé la reddition de ce qui restait de la flotte athénienne après Aigos-Potamos pour le jour de la fête d'Artémis Mounychia, c'est-à-dire la commémoration de Salamine (Plut. *Lys.* 15.1).

Chasseresse (*Agrotera*), tueuse de bêtes, viens ici vierge divine; assiste à notre trêve, afin que tu nous tiennes unis pour longtemps. Que désormais règne une amitié féconde grâce à nos conventions, et puissions nous en avoir fini avec les rusés renards. O viens ici vierge chasserresse.⁷³

Qu'en est-il de Pan maintenant? Ce qui a intéressé les commentateurs, c'est qu'on a là non seulement une fondation de culte, mais aussi l'introduction d'un nouveau dieu. Mais ce qui les a le plus surpris pour l'expliquer, c'est qu'apparemment Pan ne fait rien, sinon transmettre un message comme quoi il est bien disposé envers les Athéniens, qu'il leur a été utile en bien des circonstances et qu'il le sera encore. Et, après coup, les Athéniens, leurs affaires s'étant rétablies, accordent crédit au récit du messenger et introduisent chez eux le dieu—cela chez Hérodote.

Pausanias précise, mais peut-être est-ce seulement sa réponse, ou celle de la tradition à la question que nous nous posons, que Pan dit à Philippiès 'qu'il viendrait à Marathon combattre avec les Athéniens' ou 'en tant qu'allié,' (*summakhèsôn*): la traduction que l'on choisit est déjà une interprétation.⁷⁴ Et l'on retrouve la même idée d'un Pan *summakhos* dans les autres sources d'époque impériale, chez Lucien, sans que là encore soit précisé le mode exact de son action.⁷⁵ On ne saurait identifier, bien sûr, Pan au *phasma* barbu qui aveugla un hoplite athénien rien qu'en passant devant lui pour aller tuer son compagnon de rang, comme le propose la *Souda*.⁷⁶ Quant à la 'danse de Pan' qu'évoque Aelius Aristide pour clore sa description de la bataille, elle ne peut guère être comprise que comme la métaphore de celle-ci, un combat qui se déroule en un clin d'œil, quasi onirique, amplifiant à outrance les clichés de l'oraison funèbre classique ... elle n'est que son interprétation toute personnelle de la même tradition.⁷⁷

73 Ar. *Lys.* 1248-1272 (trad. H. Van Daele, modifiée). Images épiques les plus proches: Hom. *Il.* 11.416; 13.474-475; Hes. [Sc.] 386-390; également Eur. *Phoen.* 1380. La correction *sueikeloi* de Wilamowitz au v. 1252 est acceptée par Taillardat 1965:207; *contra*, Henderson 1987:212. Proues de navires de guerre en forme de hures de sangliers: Hdt. 3.59; Plut. *Per.* 26.4; Basch 1987:226, 232, 234 et fig. 485, 235, 246.

74 Paus. 1.28.4; cf. 8.54.6.

75 Lucien, *Dial. D.* 22.3; *Philops.* 3; *Bis accusatus* 9. Voir encore Nonnos, *Dion.* 27.299-302: 'lui qui sera plus tard un allié (*boèthoon*) dans la bataille attique, un tueur de Mèdes, un sauveur quand Marathon sera ébranlé.'

76 *Suda*, s.v. *Hippias* 2. Cf. Borgeaud 1979:146.

77 Aelius Aristide, *Panath.* 108: '... commençant par une invocation au dieu et le péan amical, ils s'élançèrent en courant, fonçant comme à travers une plaine vide, et ils ne laissèrent pas le temps aux barbares de voir ce qui arrivait, mais en un instant leurs lignes étaient brisées, les hommes étaient tués, les chevaux capturés, les navires tirés sur le rivage, l'argent emporté et tout cela était une danse de Pan.' Il ne s'agit manifestement pas d'une danse réelle (de victoire ou de joie; cf. Soph. *Aj.* 693-701), comme semble l'avoir compris R. Garland (1992:52n.3).

On songerait évidemment à un phénomène de l'ordre de la Panique, type de phénomène explicitement attribué à Pan, c'est-à-dire, strictement parlant, une peur infondée qui s'empare surtout d'une armée au camp. Aucun texte, comme le remarque Philippe Borgeaud, qui a donné l'étude principale sur ce point, ne mentionne rien de tel. Et lui-même note bien que la panique proprement dite a toujours lieu hors de l'espace de la bataille, avant, ou après chez une armée déjà vaincue.⁷⁸ La fuite de certains des Perses dans les marécages où ils se noient,⁷⁹ appartient encore à la bataille—et elle renverrait, avec un danger bien réel, plutôt au mode d'action d'Artémis qu'à celui de Pan. La solution à laquelle s'est finalement rallié Borgeaud est assez désespérée. Un désarroi aurait pris la flotte perse et aurait désorganisé ses manœuvres, l'empêchant d'arriver en vue d'Athènes avant que l'armée athénienne soit revenue de Marathon. Mais rien de cela n'est attesté.⁸⁰

Faut-il se résoudre alors à prendre acte d'un simple phénomène de psychologie individuelle? Philippiens, découragé par la mauvaise nouvelle, épuisé par la course, manquant d'oxygène, diront les plus réalistes, aurait réellement vu Pan, dans ce lieu qui lui était consacré, hallucinant la projection de son désir de rapporter un message favorable.⁸¹ Et les Athéniens l'auraient entériné par la suite.

On avance un peu plus en passant à la psychologie collective. Car ce qui importe est bien que tout cela ait été accepté par la cité. C'est le point de vue de Robert Garland. Pour lui, normalement, la cité aurait dû être frappée de *phobos*, et, je le cite: 'L'intervention du dieu peut servir de métaphore pour le moral des troupes athéniennes et de leur chef, un facteur d'importance incalculable pour déterminer l'issue des batailles,' un moral qui fut d'autant plus élevé que la situation paraissait la plus désespérée. 'Le culte du dieu Pan, dieu de la Panique, fut introduit à Athènes comme une façon d'expliquer comment le *phobos*, que nous pourrions traduire par panique, n'a pas frappé les Athéniens très largement inférieurs en nombre, comme il aurait dû logiquement le faire, mais bien les Perses qui avaient très largement la supériorité.'⁸²

Ces affirmations posent problème. Je ne suis pas absolument opposé au fait d'invoquer, à titre de comparaison, pour faire comprendre l'exaltation irrationnelle qui a dû s'emparer des Athéniens, le fameux discours d'Henri v, dans Shakespeare,

78 Borgeaud 1979:146-47 et plus généralement sur la panique, 137-56, 180-83, 185-91, 198-202.

79 Paus. 1.15.3 et 1.32.7.

80 Borgeaud 1979:146-47, 200. Cf. Garland 1992:52 et les remarques critiques de Madeleine Jost (1985:473). L'évocation de Pan poursuivant un navire perse, par Polémon le Sophiste (2.41), est un enjolivement rhétorique (Reader et Chalva-Smith 1996:329 et 222-23), plutôt qu'une allusion à une représentation non attestée par ailleurs sur la peinture de Marathon à la Stoa Poikilè (Garland 1992:52 n.3, Harrison 1972:72).

81 Burn 1984:256, Borgeaud 1979:196, Garland 1992:49-50, Lazenby 1993:52-53.

82 Garland 1992:53.

avant la bataille d'Azincourt. Ce que je conteste, c'est la traduction de *phobos* par panique. Si, à la fois, ce que j'ai dit plus haut et ce que montre Borgeaud est exact, le *phobos* décrit par Garland dans les termes que je viens de citer, ne relève pas de Pan, mais d'Artémis. La Panique grecque est tout autre chose.

Pour bien comprendre la proximité et la différence entre un *phobos* et une panique, on peut prendre un texte très clair de Polybe. Au printemps 216, Philippe V, roi de Macédoine, monte une expédition maritime, avec des navires légers, contre l'Illyrie, ayant contourné, depuis la Macédoine, toute la Grèce—donc très loin de ses bases. Or quand il arriva vers Apollonia et l'embouchure de l'Aôos (sur les côtes de l'Albanie actuelle), 'une panique, *panikon*, semblable à celles qui se répandent parfois dans les armées de terre, s'empara de sa flotte.' Quelques navires de sa flotte, attardés, avaient rencontré des bateaux ayant traversé le canal d'Otrante et venant d'Italie, du détroit de Messine, qui leur disaient avoir vu, à Rhégion, de lourds navires de guerre romains, des pentères, en route pour Apollonia. Philippe fut pris de peur (*periphobos*), et, en désordre, naviguant jour et nuit, fit retraite vers Céphallénie. Or toute cette frayeur avait été imaginaire (*pseudôs genesthai ton holon phobon*); il avait été absurdement épouvanté (*ptoètheis alogôs*). S'il n'avait pas pris la fuite, affolé, il se serait emparé de l'Illyrie, il aurait, selon toute probabilité, capturé les navires romains. Car le gros des forces romaines était occupé à bien autre chose à ce moment-là, les préparatifs de la bataille de Cannes.⁸³

On est bien là dans le contexte, décrit par Borgeaud, de ces peurs paniques qui se déclenchent hors de l'espace propre du combat. Peurs imaginaires ou fondées sur une base ténue, exagérée, où une armée isolée, aventurée en terrain non familier, perd pied et se laisse envahir par l'imagination du pire. En fait, Borgeaud a donné, à sa manière à la fois intuitive et précise, tous les moyens de comprendre ce qui se passe à Marathon avec Pan, en décrivant celui-ci, dirais-je, comme le dieu de la perte d'objet. Perte d'objet du désir dans l'érotique: les Nymphes le séduisent et s'échappent; il tourne contre elles sa fureur. C'est l'histoire d'Echo qu'il fait déchieter par les pâtres et chevriers, rendus enragés comme loups et chiens, l'écho dont le bruit fragmenté et séparé de sa source provoque en retour la panique chez les hommes et les troupeaux.⁸⁴

Pan est le dieu de la perte des repères, le dieu de la neige qui les efface—autre situation provocatrice de panique.⁸⁵ Une des formes de la folie de Pan est aussi très significative: le panolepte se jette dans le vide.⁸⁶ Pan est un dieu abandonné lui-

83 Polyb. 5.110; cf. Borgeaud 1979:149.

84 Cf. Borgeaud 1979:124-25, commentant Longus, *Daphnis et Chloé*, 23.

85 Diod. Sic. 14.32.2; 22. 9; Paus. 10.23.68 Egalement, Ant. Lib. 22; Borgeaud 1979: 96-97, 148.

86 Theoc. *Id.* 5.15-16; cf. Borgeaud 1979:155 n.64.

même à sa naissance, il est le dieu des situations où ce sur quoi l'on comptait vous manque, mais le dieu aussi recueilli, qui à son tour recueille et sauve.⁸⁷

On voit donc où je veux en venir: la 'panique' dont Pan a sauvé les Athéniens à Marathon n'est pas la peur réelle, et fort justifiée, des Perses—pour cela le traitement artémisiaque suffisait. Elle est celle, incontrôlée, qui aurait pu s'emparer d'eux, en apprenant par Philippidès, que ceux sur lesquels ils comptaient, les Spartiates, ne viendraient pas à temps et les avaient en fait abandonnés. Pan apparaît à point nommé sur le Parthénion pour confier un deuxième message qui neutralise les effets possibles du premier.

On comprend alors qu'il ne soit pas besoin d'intervention directe dans le combat, d'une deuxième épiphane: une seule suffit largement.⁸⁸ Et que la seule épigramme qui soit peut-être proche de l'événement, attribuée à Simonide, ne dise rien de plus:

'Ce chèvre-pied, moi, Pan, l'Arcadien, celui qui fut contre les Mèdes, celui qui fut avec les Athéniens, Miltiade l'a fait dresser.'⁸⁹

Et s'il fallait absolument chercher un moment où la présence de Pan fut particulièrement utile, ce ne fut pas au combat, mais dans la longue attente avant lui, au camp, quand Miltiade dut déployer tous ses talents de persuasion, les stratèges étant exactement divisés à égalité sur l'opportunité d'engager le combat, pour que le polémarque Callimachos jette le onzième vote en sa faveur et emporte la décision, sans laquelle l'armée en proie à la *stasis* se serait disloquée.

Mais, en réalité, je pense qu'il n'y a pas à chercher d'explication hors du récit d'Hérodote. Ce récit se suffit parfaitement à lui-même, il est bien l'*aition* de la fondation du culte, et toute l'explication se trouve là sous nos yeux.

En conclusion, je dirai qu'Artémis et Pan rendent compte à eux deux des deux volets bien connus et sans cesse répétés des récits athéniens sur Marathon.

Artémis: quand les Perses sont venus en nombre immense pour anéantir Athènes, nous seuls avons eu l'audace de leur tenir tête.

Pan: nous étions seuls (c'est-à-dire, nous avons été abandonnés, par nos principaux alliés) à Marathon.⁹⁰

87 Cf. *Hymn. Hom. Pan.* 35-40; Borgeaud 1979:85-86, 155-56, 224 (également 68-69).

88 C'est bien ce que semble avoir compris Pausanias (1.28.4): 'le dieu est honoré pour ce message.'

89 *Anth. Plan.* 232; cf. Borgeaud 1979:222-23.

90 Cf. Hdt. 9.27; 7.10.25; Thuc. 1.73.4; Andoc. 1.107; Lys. 2.20-21, 23; Isoc. *Paneg.* 86-87; Pl. *Menex.* 240c; Leg. 3.698d-e; Dem. 60, 10-11; Walters 1981:204-11; Loraux 1973:20-22; 1981:158-62, 165.

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