

## Derveni and Ritual

*Fritz Graf, The Ohio State University*

In many respects, the Derveni Papyrus remains as intriguing as it appeared in 1964 when Stylianos Kapsomenos published the first choice morsels to whet the appetite of the scholarly community, or when, in 1968, Walter Burkert proposed the first thorough interpretation of the text known at that time and anchored the commentary firmly in Pre-Socratic thinking. If I remember correctly, he presented this as a public lecture in Zürich when he applied for the post in Greek philology there - little did he know that the papyrus would accompany him through most of his professional career<sup>1</sup>. Over the years, the text has become even more intriguing with the full presentation of the first seven columns whose first version Kyriakos Tsantsanoglou revealed at the Princeton colloquium<sup>2</sup>. Before this, scholars thought they were dealing with an allegorical commentary on a theogony of Orpheus, but it has turned out to be a treatise that is as much about rituals as it is about Orphism or Presocratic physics - so much about rituals that Burkert suggested to identify it with a the treatise *On Rituals* (Περὶ Τελετῶν) of Stesimbrotus of Thasus, as good a guess than any, given the little we know about it and its author<sup>3</sup>.

In what follows, I will concentrate on the ritual side of the text. Taking col. xx as my starting point, I will argue for a ritual use of the Derveni Theogony (but not of the commentary), and I will explore what this means for the status and role of the anonymous commentator and for the μάγοι who appear twice in the first columns.

## II.

The one reflection on ritual that has been known almost from the start is found in col. xx (formerly colum xvi). It reads:

ὅσοι μὲν]

ἀνθρώπων[ν ἐν] τοῖς πόλεσιν ἐπιτελέσαντες [τὰ ἰ]ερά εἶδον,

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<sup>1</sup> Kapsomenos 1964, 1964/65; Burkert 1968, 1980, 1986, 1997, 1998, 2006: 95-111.

<sup>2</sup> Translation Tsantsanoglou 1997; editio princeps Kouremenos, Parássoglou and Tsantsanoglou 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Burkert 1986.

- ἔλασσόν σφας θαυμάζω μὴ γινώσκειν· οὐ γὰ οἶόν τε  
ἀκούσαι ὁμοῦ καὶ μαθεῖν τὰ λεγόμενα· ὅσοι δὲ παρὰ τοῦ  
τέχνην ποιουμένου τὰ ἱερά, οὗτοι ἄξιοι θαυμάζεσθαι  
5 καὶ οἴκτε[ί]ρεσθαι· θαυμάζεσθαι μὲν ὅτι δοκοῦντες  
πρότερον ἢ ἐπιτελέσαι εἰδήσειν ἀπέρχονται ἐπι-  
τελέσαντες πρὶν εἰδέναι οὐδ' ἐπανερόμενοι ὥσπερ  
ὡς εἰδότες τέων εἶδον ἢ ἤκουσαν ἢ ἔμαθον· [οἰ]κτε<ί>ρεσθαι δὲ  
ὅτι οὐκ ἀρκεῖ σφιν τὴν δαπάνην προσαναλώσθαι, ἀλλὰ  
10 \_\_\_ καὶ τῆς γνώμης στερόμενοι πρὸς ἀπέρχονται.  
πρὶν μὲν τὰ [ί]ερά ἐπιτελέσαι ἐλπίζον[τε]ς εἰδήσειν,  
ἐπ[ιτελέσ]αντ[ε]ς δὲ στερηθέντες κα[ὶ] τῆς ἐλπίδ[ος] ἀπέρχονται  
\_\_\_ τω[ ]· υοντ[... ] λόγος ..[... ] ται[...]. να  
.[ ] ]ι τῆι ἑαυτοῦ ο..[ ] μ]ητρι μὲν  
15 ]δ' ἀδελφῆ[ ] ωσειδε  
[Those] among men<sup>4</sup> who performed and saw the rites in the cities, with regard to those I am not as much surprised that they have no knowlegde: it is impossible to hear the ritual words and at the same time to understand them. But those who (received) the rituals from a ritual specialist, those cause deserved surprise and pity. Surprise because before they were initiated, they assumed that they would gain knowledge, but they went away from their initiation before they had this knowledge and they did not ask, as if they would already know what they were seeing or hearing or learning. Pity because it was not enough that they had to pay the fee beforehand, but they also went away deprived of knowledge. Before they performed the rites, they hoped they would know, after the performance, however, they walk away deprived even of their hope.

The passage has often been commented upon, both as to its content and to its role in the overall text<sup>5</sup>. As the very fragmentary lines 14-15 seem to indicate, its auctorial reflections ends with line 13. This intrusion of the author interrupts the flow of the allegorical interpretation at a strategically important point: after the narration how Zeus made himself the origin of the entire

<sup>4</sup> [ὅσοι μὲν] is an easy supplement to create a functioning syntax.

<sup>5</sup> A (partial) bibliography in Bernabé's edition p. 238.

cosmos, and before the story of his incest (and, as col. xxi seems to indicate, formal marriage<sup>6</sup>) with his mother (another attempt of Zeus at totality, this time genealogical totality<sup>7</sup>).

The speaker of this auctorial voice must be the author of the overall text; the two paragraphoi after lines 10 and 13 need not to mark off a quotation, as Jeffrey Rustens assumes<sup>8</sup>. In the Derveni papyrus, paragraphoi serve two functions: they mark a quotation, mostly (but not exclusively) from Orpheus' poem and often framing the quotation; and they indicate the beginning of a new paragraph even when the preceding paragraph had ended with a vacat<sup>9</sup>. It is easier to understand both paragraphoi here as marking two new paragraphs: lines 11-13 rephrase and summarize the preceding text, thus they probably are no quotation<sup>10</sup>, line 14 moves back to the interpretation at hand<sup>11</sup>. The speaker opposes people who perform rituals (ἐπιτελέω, the proper verb for performing any ritual) in cities to those who get their rituals from a specialist, παρὰ τέχνην ποιουμένου τὰ ἱερά. There is general agreement that we deal not with any ritual but with the rites of mystery cults: the performers in the cities are described as people who “see the sacred things,” τὰ ἱερά εἶδον; seeing the rites is typical for Eleusis from the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* onwards<sup>12</sup>. But the author must mean more than just the one city mystery cult of Athens, if his plural ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι deserves any credit; I take it that ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι does not necessarily mean what we have learned to call a polis cult, that is a cult financed and supervised by the polis and concerned with the welfare of the city as well, but simply a cult that is performed in a city sanctuary and with group participation, as were for example the rites of Dionysos Bakcheios in Olbia according to Herodotus<sup>13</sup>. In the later fifth century, the most likely time for the treatise, the one mystery cult that is widespread enough among Greek cities is the Bacchic mysteries, attested in the late sixth and early fifth centuries in cities as far apart as Ephesos, Olbia Pontica, and Cumae in Italy. This

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<sup>6</sup> The column mentions Aphrodite and Peitho, the usual divinities that assist and are invoked in the wedding ritual.

<sup>7</sup> I read the presence of Aphrodite Ourania, Peitho and Harmonia in col. xxi as aition of the traditional wedding ritual with its sacrifices to these deities. – For another attempt at genealogical totality, written as a joke by a gifted medievalist, see Heimito von Doderer's hilarious novel *Die Merowinger*.

<sup>8</sup> Rusten 1984: 138-140; see the counter arguments of Obbink 1997:44-45.

<sup>9</sup> Quotations: iv 6, viii 1, xii 2, xiii 3/4, xiv 5/6, xv 5/6, xv 12, xvi 2/6, xix 9, xxiii 10/11, xxiv 2/3, xxv 13/14, xxvi 3/4, 11/12; new paragraph: x 10, xi 7, xii 6, xv 10, xxiii 7.

<sup>10</sup> Except if we assume that after line 10, the scribe marked a paragraph inside a quotation that would end at 13; but this assumption accepts the double function of the paragraphoi and is unnecessarily complex.

<sup>11</sup> I will come back to the question below.

<sup>12</sup> Hom. *H. Cer.* 480, with the passages collected by Richardson 1974, ad loc.

<sup>13</sup> Hdt. 4.79.

then means that the professionals “who make the sacred into their craft” are not the Eleusinian priests such as the Eumoplids whose activities could be described in this way, but the religious entrepreneurs that Plato describes as μάντεις καὶ ἀγύρται who, in his negative and rather hostile representation, peddle private initiations to the rich. There is no need to separate these specialists whom a few later texts call *Orpheotelestai*, from the initiators in the cities: they might well all have performed Bacchic rituals<sup>14</sup>.

The author regrets that the clients of these private mystery initiators did not obtain the knowledge which they could have gained, if they only had asked their initiator. He concedes that such a demand would have been out of place during the rites in the cities: “It is impossible to hear the ritual words and at the same time to understand them,” οὐ γὰρ οἶόν τε | ἀκοῦσαι ὁμοῦ καὶ μαθεῖν τὰ λεγόμενα. In its reading, then, the key to knowledge is not the ritual gestures or the objects shown, despite the focus on seeing (εἶδον), but the words spoken during the ritual: in order to obtain knowledge, the initiates would have needed not only to hear the *legomena*, but to have them explained: interpretation has to follow initiation. The words uttered during the rituals (prayers, hymns, invocations) have a surface meaning that the participants could easily catch during the ritual; but their deeper meaning has eluded them, because they did not ask for elucidation after the end of the ritual.

There is, of course, a text that immediately qualifies for exactly this sort of *legomenon*: it is the theogony of Orpheus whose surface meaning of gods behaving strangely the Derveni author explains in physical terms. In col. vii 2, he introduces the theogony he is interpreting as a “hymn,” [ῥ]ῆμον [ῥ]ητὴ καὶ θεμιτὰ λέγοντα<sup>15</sup>. If taken seriously again, at this time and in this sort of text, ῥυμος must be cult poetry as in Plato and other fifth and fourth century texts, used as *legomena* during some ritual act, not any poetic composition about the gods, as in Homer and Hesiod<sup>16</sup>. Plato confirms this when he says that the ἀγύρται καὶ μάντεις were using “a din of books”, βιβλῶν ὁμαδόν, by Orpheus and Musaios in their rites, καθ’ ἃς θυηπολοῦσιν<sup>17</sup>; so does Euripides’ Theseus in the famous passage where he accuses Hippolytos of being a Bacchic sectarian, worshipping “the smoke of books” of Orpheus<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Plato perseveres in his hostility against the religious entrepreneurs: *Legg.* 909B proposes imprisonment for them. – On the *Orpheotelestai* see Graf and Johnston 2007: 145-146.

<sup>15</sup> Although it would be possible to supplement σε]μνον (see Bernabé ad loc.), [ῥ]ῆμον gives much better sense.

<sup>16</sup> Hom. *Od.* 8.249 (the Demodokos story); Hom. *h. Ap.* 161; Hes. *OD* 662 (with West’s remark) as against e.g. Aesch. *Pers.* 623, *Sept.* 866; Plat. *Rep.* 459e, 607a, *Legg.* 700b; Demosth. *Or.* 21.5; Philochor. *FGrHist* 328 F 188.

<sup>17</sup> Plat. *Rep.* 2. 364be.

<sup>18</sup> Eur. *Hipp.* 953f. = Orph. F 627 Bernabé.

In col. xx, the author distinguishes between two groups of people, both initiates: those who, through neglect or ignorance, deprived themselves of the full benefit of initiation, and those who would follow his advice and gain deeper knowledge. A similar dichotomy appears several times throughout the interpretation of Orpheus' poem, between those who take the text literally, and those who, like the author, understand the deeper meaning<sup>19</sup>. Depending on whom we assume the addressees of the book to be, these dichotomies refer to the same groups, or to different ones: if we assume the book to be addressed to initiates only, the opposition between regular initiates and more enlightened ones remains the same throughout the text; if, however, we assume a wider audience for the book, the dichotomy in the rest of the book is between those who know, mainly the Derveni author, and anybody else who might have access to the text of Orpheus' theogony. Column xx is the only passage where the commentator clarifies the dichotomy; everywhere else, both assumptions are viable.

If we understand the poem in this way, the famous and often-remembered introductory line to Orpheus' hymn whose second half the author comments upon in vii 9 serves a double purpose. Its full version is transmitted in two forms, ἀείσω ξυνετοῖσι or φθέγξομαι οἷς θέμις ἐστί, both completing the hexameter with the command θύραξ δ' ἐπίθεσθε, βέβηλοι<sup>20</sup>. We do not know which version the Derveni commentator read, but we can make a reasonable guess. His usual practice is to quote first at least one entire hexameter that fills its own line and is framed by two paragraphoi, then to comment on parts of the quotation that he usually cites again, lemma-like, at the beginning of his comments. vii 9 is such a lemma, as usual without a paragraphos; the entire verse then must have been cited towards the end of col. vi of which we have lost the lower two thirds. When the papyrus text sets in again in col. vii, vii 2 describes the poem as a ὕμνος ... θεμιτὰ λέγων. I suspect that this echoes the opening φθέγξομαι οἷς θέμις ἐστί – an opening that fits a ritual situation somewhat better than the second version (ἀείσω ξυνετοῖσι), although Plutarch explicitly connects this second variant with ritual performance, ἐν τελετῇ<sup>21</sup>. When the text was recited in the ritual, either opening kept away the non-initiated; for the allegorist, provoked to be one of those who have understanding, ξυνετοί, it provoked and justified his search for a second level of meaning.

In what we read of col. xx, the writer again justifies his own – preceding and following – allegorical explanation. But why in the middle of the interpretation and not at the beginning? To

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<sup>19</sup> The principle (Orpheus “speaks in riddles,” ἐν αἰνίγμασιν, vii 4-8); the opposition in ix 2 (οἱ οὐ γινώσκοντες), xii 3-5 (ἀμαρτάνουσι ... οὐ γινώσκοντες), xviii 3-6 (Orpheus versus οἱ ἄλλοι ἄνθρωποι).

<sup>20</sup> Orph. F 1a, 1b, 377 and 378 Bernabé.

<sup>21</sup> Plut. Frg. 202 Sandbach.

do him justice, he has justified his methodology at the outset of the interpretation, in col. vii, as well. Orpheus' text, he said there, is enigmatic for ordinary humans, ἀνθρώποις αἰνιγματώδης (vii 5)<sup>22</sup>: this explains the need for allegory. But this not nearly as forceful as what we read in col. xx. The key to the answer, I suspect, lies in the assertion that the hymn “tells things that conform to divinely sanctioned standards,” θεμιτὰ λέγοντα. Before col. xx, we might have some surface events that hardly qualified to this standard, such as the swallowing of Ouranos' genitals (if this is meant in col. xii 4<sup>23</sup>). But the real scandal is yet to come; it is Zeus' marriage and incest with his mother. At about the same time, the Athenians heard on their stage how Jocasta had hanged herself and how her son and husband Oedipus had dug out his eyes to punish themselves for what Oedipus himself terms ἀσέβεια, “lack of respect for the gods” who set these standards<sup>24</sup> – and Zeus' incest is worse, because premeditated and not the result of divine intrigue and human flaw. It makes some rhetorical sense to enter into yet another discussion of the need for allegorization at the very point before the story touches upon this final scandal.

I suspect that the paragraphoi after col. xx 10 and 13 have to be seen in this same context. I have argued above that they mark the beginnings of two new paragraphs. The first paragraph, 11-13, is very short. Lines 11-12 rephrase the immediately preceding argument: “Before they performed the rites, they hoped they would know, after the performance, however, they walk away deprived even of their hope;” I suspect that line 13 ended the digression with a final summarizing statement of which we only can read λόγος. I do not think that 11/12 is a textual variant, as the Greek editors understand it<sup>25</sup> – I cannot see the need for offering variant readings in this sort of text, unlike in the scholarly editions or in texts destined for oral performance where the exact wording was vital for the success of the performance, such as healing and other spells in the Magical Papyri or the manuscripts of Cato's *On Agriculture*<sup>26</sup>. I rather think that this small paragraph highlights the main message of the auctorial digression at its very end – that the reader should not follow the example of the foolish initiates people but listen to the professional

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<sup>22</sup> See esp. Calame 2005.

<sup>23</sup> See the discussion in Kouremenos, Parássoglou and Tsanstanoglou 2006: 26-28 who cite earlier positions.

<sup>24</sup> Oedipus as ἀεβής: Soph. *OT* 1441, cp. 1382 (the killer of king Laius); in 1360, he calls himself ἄθεος and ἀνοσίων παῖς.

<sup>25</sup> p. 241, with some hesitation.

<sup>26</sup> In the magical papyri such textual variations are usually introduced by ἐν ἄλλωι (εὔρωι) “I found in another copy” or similar formulae, *PGM* II 50, IV 500. 1277, V 51, VII 204, XII 201, XIII 731. – Cato, *Agr.* 160, with a similar formula (modern editions print one variation, in a rather superficial decision since both variations must be ancient, and ban the other into the critical apparatus).

explanations that provide knowledge free of charge. These paragraphoi, then, function as marginal signs to catch the attention of a reader who was browsing the text; this also helps understand why they mark a new paragraph even after a vacat.

The papyrus contains another case of an auctorial digression on methodology that is framed by two paragraphoi and thus singled out as interrupting the flow of the allegorization, and important enough to be underlined. It is to be found in col. xiii 5 and 6:

ὅτι μὲν πᾶσαν τὴν πόησιν περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων αἰνίζεται, καθ' ἔπος ἕκαστα ἀνάγκη λέγειν.

Since he composed the entire poem as a riddle about reality, one has to read word by word.

It is an important hermeneutical precept; and even though I do not think that the commentator follows his own precept literally, this precept almost guarantees that we deal with a rather short text, well suited as a text spoken during a ritual<sup>27</sup>. It comes at another crucial passage, at the very moment when Orpheus has Zeus swallow his fathers genitals – the genitals from which he earlier masturbated the aither, in Burkert's attractive reading<sup>28</sup>. Gods behaving offensively again trigger explicit methodology.

All this has an immediate consequence for our understanding of col. xx. Interpreters are divided into two camps, those who read the text as being critical of Orphic mysteries, and those who took it as a serious admonition to ask for more information when being initiated<sup>29</sup>. I have no doubts that the latter understanding is the correct one, not the least because it leads to a consistent and organical understanding of this digression. The writer himself is τέχνην ποιούμενος τὰ ἱερά, a religious entrepreneur; his specialty is the physical explanation of the texts he uses in his ritual. If he offers the allegorical explanation of the Orphic text as an example of his art, he addresses both prospective initiates who are looking for a knowledgeable specialist, and people initiated by others who desire to know more than they had been taught there; alternatively, we will have to assume that the intended audience is initiates only. The Macedonian nobleman buried in Derveni grave B most likely is such an initiate, as was the person buried in grave A that contained the splendid Dionysiac crater; the fact that the charred remains of the book was found not among the grave goods but on top of the stone slab that closed the grave, together with the remains of everything else he had on his body, suggests that the deceased had the scroll on his body, most

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<sup>27</sup> See also the two versions of the so-called *Testament of Orpheus*, Orph. F 377 and 378 Bernabé: both are short, ca. 25 hexameters (F 277) and 41 hexameters respectively (F 378). See Riedweg 1993.

<sup>28</sup> Burkert 2006: 103.

<sup>29</sup> See Kouremenos in Kouremenos, Parássoglou and Tsantsanoglou 2006: 53-58, 238-240 who sees the author as rejecting any religious interpretation,

likely holding it in his hand, as does the deceased on the Basel Orpheus vase<sup>30</sup>. It might even be that the entire small cluster of élite graves that is far away from the main graveyard area of the city of Lete was a Bacchic graveyard; the existence of such separate graveyards is suggested by an inscription from Italian Cumae, dated to before 450 BCE<sup>31</sup>.

### III.

The Derveni commentator claims that it is possible to gain knowledge (μαθεῖν, εἰδέναι) in mystery rites, if one only listens to an allegorist. In a famous fragment from his early *On Philosophy*, Aristotle thinks otherwise:

Aristotle thinks that those who undergo initiation should not learn but experience and being brought into a certain condition (τοὺς τελουμένους οὐ μαθεῖν τι δεῖν ἀλλὰ παθεῖν καὶ διατεθῆναι)<sup>32</sup>.

The fragment inserts itself into a very specific Platonic context, as Synesius (who cites it) makes clear. The Neoplatonic bishop of Cyrene juxtaposes two groups of extraordinary men who open up to divine inspiration: the very few who have an immediate access to the divine, such as Egyptian ascetic monks, and the many religiously minded who need rational arguments to be brought to the jumping-off point of revelation. Bacchic mysteries are a reference point throughout this discussion. Synesius refers to Plato's quotation of the famous verse of Orpheus, πολλοὶ μὲν ναρθηκοφόροι, παῦροι δέ τε βάκχοι: "for there are many that carry the thyrsus, but few are the Bacchi"<sup>33</sup>: this Bacchic and Platonic dichotomy reflects the two ways of attaining inspiration. But even the most extraordinary men have to be conscious of their human nature, as an allegorical interpretation of handling the basket with the phallus in the mysteries of Bacchus shows; the source for this is unclear.

The dichotomy goes back to Plato himself, although Plato used it differently, to describe the process of philosophical access to truth in mystery language. As Christoph Riedweg has shown, the Platonic tradition metaphorically applies to the philosophical process a three-step access to

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<sup>30</sup> This might even explain the way the scroll burned: the part that was protected by the deceased person's hand was the only part that survived the flames.

<sup>31</sup> Arena 1994: no. 15.

<sup>32</sup> Frg. 15, from. Synes. *Dio* 10. See also Psellos, *Schol. in Ioh. Clim.* 6,171 who seems to know the same Aristotelian text.

<sup>33</sup> Plat. *Phd.* 69c.



divine revelation as performed in the mystery cults: after a first purificatory step, the second step consists in teaching and learning (*παράδοσις*, *traditio*), whereas the final step is pure vision, *ἐποπτεία*. This is never spelled out in Plato's extant writings, but it is present in later Platonists, starting with Aristotle: it might well be part of Plato's oral teachings that did not surface in his own written dialogues, but in the writings of his students and followers.

If Riedweg's analysis is correct, we perceive a Platonic doctrine that resonates in an intricate way with what the Derveni author says. Mystery initiation contains an element of *μαθεῖν*; it is central to the Derveni author, but preliminary only in the Platonic tradition. Both sides agree that an important part of the teaching of the mystery cults is the tradition of myths. If we take Plato seriously, these myths were theogonical and eschatological. In *Republic* 377e, Socrates thinks that the story of Cronus' castration should be only told secretly and to very few only, after a sacrifice that is much more expensive than a piglet (the piglet might refer to the Eleusinian preliminary sacrifice; more important is the fact that Plato can imagine traditional theogonic poetry in a mystery context). In *Laws* 870d, Plato talks about a *λόγος ἐν ταῖς τελεταῖς* that tells of punishment after death. Isocrates informs us that it was the Demeter myth that was told to the initiates in Eleusis<sup>34</sup>. Both Plato and the Derveni author agree that these myths are the *legomena* of the mystery rituals, and that they are only preliminary to the acquisition of truth. They split on the way how to acquire this final truth. For the Derveni author, it can be acquired from the initiator who should be able to explain the *legomena*: the truth consists in a final discursive rationalization and allegorization of the ritual texts. Plato disagrees radically: the final truth is available only through mystical experience, during which the philosopher experiences a direct vision that transcends any rationality.

We can understand these two positions as two different reactions to the same ritual facts: an initiation ritual contained both *dromena* and *legomena*, and it claimed a very special insight as its final goal; it is worth while recalling that in Greek to see, *ιδεῖν*, and to know, *εἰδέναί*, are closely connected. The Platonic tradition understood this special knowledge as created by an emotional experience (*παθεῖν καὶ διατεθῆναι*, in Aristotle's terms<sup>35</sup>), the Derveni author as the result of individual discursive rationalization. This sounds not unlike the difference between Plato and the Sophists who stress their technical, rational approach: I cannot help thinking that Plato was aware of such a position and refuted it; he had, after all, precise knowledge of the doings of *ἀγύρται καὶ μάντιες*. It does not necessarily follow that he knew the Derveni text; as Burkert had noted

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<sup>34</sup> Isocr. *Paneg.* 28

<sup>35</sup> Aristot. *fig.* 15 Rose.

already in 1968, the philosophical horizon of the Derveni author is decidedly un-Platonic and thus most likely pre-Platonic. But it means that there existed a late fifth/early fourth century discourse on the experience gained in mystery cults that was important enough that Plato felt compelled to state his own position.

#### IV.

If the Derveni author is an Orpheotelest (to use the term as a shortcut to the complex of religious entrepreneurship that manifested itself in divination, purification, initiation and binding spells and in the creation of texts that were needed for these ritual and pretended to be written by Orpheus and Musaios), and if his allegorical explanation of the theogonical hymn of Orpheus explains a ritual text used in the Bacchic mysteries, how does this tie into the ritual discourse that we can glimpse in columns i-vi, especially in cols. v and vi? More precisely: what does this mean for the rituals discussed in col. vi as rituals performed by μάγοι, and for the μάγοι themselves? Are they Persian priests or Greek sorcerers?<sup>36</sup>

Nothing in the rites suggests that the rites were Persian as opposed to Greek, and Sarah Johnston's discussion has made clear why<sup>37</sup>. Libations of milk and water are common for the Eumenides, as Albert Henrichs has shown long ago<sup>38</sup>, and sacrificial cakes are a widespread although under-researched ingredient of many Greek sacrificial rites: in a Greek text, this remains firmly inside a Greek ritual horizon. Although one could imagine (unattested) sacrificial cakes among the Persians, and although Herodotus tells us that Xerxes' magi performed libations to the heroes at Troy (perhaps imitating Greek customs)<sup>39</sup>, nothing forces us to assume in the Derveni text that we deal with Persian rituals and with Persian specialists performing them.

This opens up a quandary. If the μάγοι are Greeks, we have been taught (and I myself was involved in formulating this theory) that the term started out as polemical and negative, as a designation of the itinerant religious entrepreneurs by their enemies, the equally entrepreneurial philosophers and scientific doctors who disqualified their religious rivals as foreign priests. But since the Derveni author himself is a religious entrepreneur, and since nothing in his description of the rituals in cols. v and vi points to a negative reading of the rites and their performers, this

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<sup>36</sup> Resolutely Persian according to the Russell 2001: 46–56; but he overlooks the Greek side.

<sup>37</sup> See her contribution in this volume.

<sup>38</sup> Henrichs 1984: 255–268; Graf 1980: 209–221.

<sup>39</sup> Hdt. 7.43.

cannot be true. The μάγοι must be colleagues of the Derveni author, maybe of a somewhat different brand, maybe even the same. How can this be? It becomes unavoidable to look again at the early attestations of μάγος between Heraclitus and Aristotle.

The bulk of the attestations can be safely disregarded for the moment: they come from Herodotus' *Histories* and Xenophon' *Cyropedia* and concern the μάγοι as religious specialists in Persian society, especially in the king's entourage. Xenophon's descriptions, by the way, are much more stereotyped than Herodotus's: the μάγοι in the *Cyropedia* all function as religious *exegetai* and sacrificers to whose authority Cyrus easily submits.

This leaves us with only a handful of texts before the fourth century BCE. The first text is the famous (and disputed) fragment from Heraclitus, cited by Clement of Alexandria<sup>40</sup>:

Τίσι δὴ μαντεύεται Ἡράκλειτος ὁ Ἐφέσιος; *Νυκτιπόλοις, μάγοις, βάκχοις, λήναις, μύσταις*, τούτοις ἀπειλεῖ τὰ μετὰ θάνατον, τούτοις μαντεύεται τὸ πῦρ· τὰ γὰρ νομιζόμενα κατὰ ἀνθρώπους μυστήρια ἀνιερῶσι μυσθῶνται.

To whom prophesies Heraclitus of Ephesus: to the dwellers in the night, the magi, bacchi, menads, initiates: those he threatens with what will come after death, to those he prophesies the fire: what the people call mysteries is performed in an ungodly way.

There can be little doubt that the entire list, from *νυκτιπόλοις* to *μύσταις*, is Heraclitean; the rest is Clement's recapitulation. *Νυκτιπόλοι* might well be an adjective, not a noun: four groups of people are active during the night, three groups of performers of Bacchic mystery rites (the *βάκχοι* being perhaps a special group among the initiates of Dionysus, more exalted than the simple "bearers of narthex", the *λήναι* and *μύσται*), and a group of religious executives, the μάγοι. In itself, the term is not negative, it is as descriptive as the other three are – but unlike those it is not Greek but Persian. We thus learn (and I confess my own surprise) of priests in Bacchic mystery cults in occupied Eastern Ionia during the Persian occupation who called themselves μάγοι.

The two only attestations from tragedy are trickier to gauge. Oedipus is angry at Tiresias and abuses him as a false prophet, bought by Creon – "this wizard hatcher of plots, this crafty beggar who has sight only when it come to profit, but in his art is blind" (μάγον τοιόνδε μηχανορράφον, | δόλιον ἀγύρτην, ὅστις ἐν τοῖς κέρδεσιν | μόνον δέδορκε, τὴν τέχνην δ' ἔφω τυφλός<sup>41</sup>). Lloyd-Jones' translation "wizard" begs the question: it might well be that the term is descriptive only and gets its negative force only from the adjectives. At any rate, even if negative, "wizard" is

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<sup>40</sup> Heracl. DK 21 B 14.

<sup>41</sup> Soph. *OT* 384-6.

somewhat beyond the point: Tiresias is a seer, and it is his divinatory profession that is expressed by μάγος. Ἀγύρτης, the second noun, is in itself descriptive as well: he is the priest who “collects contributions”. Such priests, however, never belonged to established polis cults but to marginal and often foreign cults; unlike the polis priest, they were itinerant professionals, not citizens serving their community. The contrast with the citizen priesthood must have been enough to give the term a somewhat negative connotation. But again, as with the μάγος, it is the adjective that carries the main weight of Oedipus’ abuse.

The second passage is easier. In Euripides’ *Helen*, a servant describes the sudden disappearance of Helen, “through sorcery, the art of the *magoi* or the secret attack of the gods” (ἦτοι φαρμάκοις | ἢ μάγων τέχναις ἢ θεῶν κλοπαῖς<sup>42</sup>). The passage is fully descriptive; the μάγοι wield supernatural power to which humans cannot resist.

Finally, there is the attack of the Hippocratic doctor on those who propounded a religious explanation and a ritual cure for epilepsy, “people like the magicians, purifiers, begging priests and quacks of our own time, men who claim great piety and superior knowledge,” ἄνθρωποι οἳοι καὶ νῦν εἰσι μάγοι τε καὶ καθάρται καὶ ἀγύρται καὶ ἀλαζόνες, ὀκόσοι δὴ προσποιέονται σφόδρα θεοσεβέες εἶναι καὶ πλεόν τι εἰδέναι<sup>43</sup>. Some of the nouns are derogatory (ἀλαζόνες and, somewhat less negative, ἀγύρται; this word appears also in Sophocles), the others are descriptive: overall, it is the context and the following relative clause that convey most of the negativity, not the terms in itself. On the other hand, if we disregard the polemical tone and take the claim of religiosity (θεοσεβέες εἶναι) and superior knowledge as defining characteristics of these specialists, we arrive again at the same description of religious entrepreneurs that we can gauge from col. xx of the Derveni text.

Thus, these passages present the μάγος as an itinerant religious entrepreneur, concerned with Bacchic initiations that had an eschatological component (Heraclitus), divination (Sophocles), healing and purification (*On the Sacred Disease*) and strange supernatural acts (Euripides). With the Derveni μάγοι, these specialists share the concern with the afterlife (col. vi) and, if we assume that the speaker is not very different from the *magoi*, divination (col. v) and initiation into mystery cults (col. xx). We hear at least of one historical seer who combined similar activities in his own activities: two passages from Old Comedy describe the seer and *chresmologos* Diopieithes as an ecstatic performer (παραμαινόμενος) whose performances comprised dance and the music of

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<sup>42</sup> Eur. *Or.* 1494.

<sup>43</sup> Hippocr. *De Morbo sacro* 2.

tympana<sup>44</sup>; if Diopieithes were not an outspoken enemy of Anaxagoras, he would easily qualify as yet another candidate for the title of Derveni author<sup>45</sup>. Diopieithes' portrait in comedy recalls both Plato's description of the ἀγύρται καὶ μάντιες and the use which Bacchic initiators and Orpheotelests made of the *tympanon*<sup>46</sup>. We can see a similar constellation inside an Athenian family, with an interesting sociological twist that belies Plato's dismissive description: whereas Aeschines' mother Glaukothea was the high-priestess of the ecstatic and cathartic mysteries of a divinity that must have been close to Dionysus, her brother Kleiobolos was a famous seer rich enough to serve as Athenian general and leave an impressive grave stele<sup>47</sup>. The healing and cathartic power of the μάγος, by the way, seems to have been fully established in the fourth century: Theophrastus has no problems in talking of healing μαγεία<sup>48</sup>, and later Atticist lexicographers derive the word μάγος from ἀπομάσσειν, "to cleanse ritually", as did young Aeschines with the clients of his mother: the lexicographers might reproduce an etymology that goes back to fourth century BCE. Also, it is only in this same century that the term becomes negative. Presumably in Hellenistic times an ethnographer, the writer of the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Magikos*, stresses that "the Persians do not practice wizardry," τὴν γοητικὴν μαγείαν<sup>49</sup>.

But Greek conceptualizations of the Persian *mágoi* were rather more ambiguous than is suggested by the protest of whoever wrote the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Magikos*. For some, they were indeed priests of another culture, either seen as authoritative as in Herodotus and Xenophon, or as somewhat uncanny, as in the historian Theopompus who tells of their power to resuscitate the dead<sup>50</sup>. To philosophers such as Aristotle, they represented an alien but acceptable philosophy whose doctrines could be cited in the same breath as those of early Greek

<sup>44</sup> Ameipsias Frg. 10 Kock ὥστε ποιούντες χρησμούς αὐτοὶ διδάσ' ἄδειν Διοπέθει τῷ παραμεινομένῳ. – Phrynichos Frg. 9 ἀνὴρ χορεύει καὶ τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ καλά. | βούλει Διοπέθει μεταδράμω καὶ τύμπανα;

<sup>45</sup> The sources on Diopieithes in Kett 1966: 33 no. 21.

<sup>46</sup> See the *Orpheotelestai* in Philodemus, *On Poems* 1.181 Janko, and king Ptolemy IV Philopator in Plut. *Agis and Cleomenes* 54.2. 820D (τελετὰς τελεῖν καὶ τύμπανον ἔχων ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις ἀγείρειν); see also Plut. *Mor.* 60A.

<sup>47</sup> See Kett 52 no. 42; the epigram *SEG* 16,193

<sup>48</sup> Theophr. *HP* 15.7: the plant moly, used πρὸς τὰ ἀλεξιφάρμακα καὶ τὰς μαγείας.

<sup>49</sup> Aristot. Frg. 36; the late source ascribes the same distinction to Deinon and Hermodorus, the former a little known Hellenistic historian from Rhodes, the latter perhaps a student of Plato's.

<sup>50</sup> Theopompus, *FGrHist* 115 F 64a; he cites the satyr play *Harpalos*, performed ca. 324 BCE at the Dionysia on the river Hydaspes that ascribes this art to the βαρβάρων μάγοι (Athen. 13.68, 595 D).

philosophers<sup>51</sup>. To others again, they were simply weird and sexually ambiguous figures; to think that they were not really Greek helped to save one's own identity. On stage, Greeks could relish actors that were called *magōidoi* ("singers in the style of the *mágoi*). Aristoxenos of Tarentum, a student of Aristotle, describes them as comic actors that performed both male and female parts; Athenaeus, who cites Aristoxenus, describes them thus:

The so-called *magōidós* has hand drums and cymbals and his entire dress is that of a woman. He makes exotic movements and behaves entirely without order, playing either adulterous women and procuresses, or drunken men who during their revelries encounter their paramours<sup>52</sup>.

But there is more in this than just ambiguous sexuality. Hand drums and cymbals are the stock instruments of ecstatic cults; no Persian *mágoi* used them, as far as we know, but they were the standard outfit of the Orpheotelests, the initiators into Bacchic cults who relied on the writings of Orpheus<sup>53</sup>. An average fifth-century Greek met a *mágos* not in the Persian empire, but in a Greek town, as the itinerant priest of Bacchic mysteries who also offered an array of other ritual services.

In the light of all this, and especially of Heraclitus' testimony, I understand the Derveni μάγοι as religious specialists who might have been first active in the Greek East and who claimed the title of the Persian specialist for themselves. The dialect of the Derveni treatise itself might point to the Greek East as place of composition, although I subscribe to Tsantsanoglou's careful admonition that "some prose author's employed Ionic or mixed Ionic as a literary dialect irrespective of their provenance"<sup>54</sup>. After all, as Herodotus shows, the Persian μάγοι were exactly

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<sup>51</sup> Aristoteles, *Metaphysica* 1091 a 30 cites the *mágoi* alongside of Empedocles, Pherecydes of Syros and Anaxagoras; in his lost *On Philosophy* Frg. 6, he accurately reported on Zoroastrian dualism and regarded the *mágoi* as older as the Egyptians. See also Plato, *Alcibiades Maior* 122ab (presumably spurious), with an equally positive opinion on Zoroastrian *mágoi*: they teach the King "the worship of the gods", θεῶν θεραπεία. – In his *Republic*, Plato has a much poorer opinion on the *mágoi*: in a passage in bk. 9, 572e, he talks about the lawless seducers of a morally healthy youth as δεινοὶ μάγοι τε καὶ τυραννοποιοὶ, "dire magicians and tyrant-makers" who encourage his irrational passions. The reference here is either again to the Persian *mágoi* as royal advisers, or to the powerful but evil rhetorical power of the seducers, in a reaction to Gorgias, or to both.

<sup>52</sup> Athen. 14.14, p. 621C ὁ δὲ μαγῶδὸς καλούμενος τύμπανα ἔχει καὶ κύμβαλα καὶ πάντα τὰ περὶ αὐτὸν ἐνδύματα γυναικεῖα· σκινίζεται δὲ καὶ πάντα ποιεῖ τὰ ἔξω κόσμου, ὑποκρινόμενος ποτὲ μὲν γυναῖκας [καὶ] μοιχοὺς καὶ μαστροπούς, ποτὲ δὲ ἄνδρα μεθύοντα καὶ ἐπὶ κῶμον παραγινόμενον πρὸς τὴν ἐρωμένην.

<sup>53</sup> Philodemus, *On Poems* 1.181 Janko; Plut. *Agis and Cleomenes* 54.2. 820D; see above n. 46.

<sup>54</sup> Tsantsanoglou etc, 2006: 11.

this: independent religious specialists who claimed special knowledge in sacrificial technique and on the interpretation of dreams and omens. It might be that after the Persian conquest of Lydia in 547 BCE enterprising Persian μάγοι began to serve the needs of Greeks and even adapted their ritual repertoire to Greek demands for mystery cults; it might also be that enterprising Greeks claimed the prestige of the Persians for themselves, as Tsantsanoglou has suggested.

We can perceive a similar development among the Etruscan *haruspici*, as a result of the cultural contact between Etruria and Rome: whereas the Roman state employed only professional haruspices who belonged to the established families of Etruria, itinerant *haruspices* from other backgrounds offered their services to whoever wanted them, and incurred the contempt and scorn of upper-class Romans such as Cato the Elder. There is no guarantee whatsoever that these lesser *haruspices* were Etruscan at all, as there is no guarantee that Heraclitus' μάγοι or those of the Derveni papyrus were Persian<sup>55</sup>.

I want to go one step further. In his most exhaustive description of a Persian sacrifice and the role of the μάγοι in it, Herodotus regales us with an unusual detail. Once the victim is slaughtered and its meat (all the meat, the gods get nothing) is cooked and laid out on a bed of herbs, “a μάγος ἀνὴρ who stands nearby sings a theogony, as they call the ritual chant; there are no sacrifices without the magos” (παρεστεῶς ἐπαΐδει θεογονίην, οἷην δὴ ἐκεῖνοι λέγουσι εἶναι τὴν ἐπαιδίην· ἄνευ γὰρ δὴ μάγου οὐ σφι νόμος ἐστὶ θυσίας ποιέεσθαι<sup>56</sup>). Herodotus hesitates when it comes to the term θεογονίη and he treats it as if it were a translation from Persian; his hesitation seems to be based on the fact that a ritual chant, ἐπαιδίη, the term also used to designate a healing spell, should not have the form of a narrative theogony: the Persians seem to mix literary categories. But of course this is exactly what the role of the Derveni theogony is: a hymn, a ritual song, performed in the course of an initiatory ritual.

## V.

Let me end with a final suggestion. I am struck by the fact that, once again, Heraclitus has cropped up, this time as the main witness to the μάγοι as they appear in col. vi. As I already said, furthermore, Heraclitus's νυκτιπόλοι μάγοι, βάκχοι, λήναι and μύσται, Bacchic initiates and their initiation priests, must have taken a lively interest in the afterlife: if Heraclitus predicts to them fire

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<sup>55</sup> See the overview in Briquel 1997: 9-50.

<sup>56</sup> Hdt. 1. 132.

after their death, he must somehow turn the tables on them. Clement's patchwork quote seems to make at least this clear, despite its opaqueness: Heraclitus does not just attack mystery rites, he connects them with eschatological beliefs. Fire must either have been significantly absent from their *post-mortem* hopes, or (more likely) it must have played a negative and punitive role in their eschatology.

References to fire as a post-mortem punishment in Greek (or, for that matter, Roman) eschatological thinking are relatively rare. (Pyri)Phlegethon, the underworld river, is mostly a boundary marker, not a place of punishment, although in the *Phaedo* parricides and matricides are annually swept out from Tartaros κατὰ τὸν Πυριφλεγέθοντα, “in the region of the Pyriphlegeton”<sup>57</sup>. Diels read the name in a passage from Philodemus' first book *On the Gods* where Philodemus talks about human fear as a reason for belief in gods: humans fear gods as the ones who are responsible for the bad things after death (δραστικούς τῶν κακῶν τῶν ἐν Ἄιδου), because they lead them to the punishing fire (ἐν τούτῳ πυρωθησομένους)<sup>58</sup>. The crucial word is mostly restored, π[υρω]θησ[ομέν]ους, although the following comparison with Phalaris and his fiery bull makes the restoration likely – but the punishment is so rare that Diels thought this to be the first attestation in extant Greek literature; “der Syrer Philodem,” he speculated in the spirit of his time, might have learned it from “orientalische Gehennavorstellungen.”

But there is at least one other, presumably earlier, and certainly very Greek attestation. It appears in a strangely suggestive context:

Those who have spent their life in evil deeds are brought by the Erinyes through Tartaros to Erebos and Chaos: there is the place of the Unholy Ones (ἄσεβῶν χώρος) [...] There they are consumed by eternal punishments, gnawed by wild animals, burnt by the torches of the Poinai, suffered every abominable thing.

Thus the final eschatology in the Pseudo-Platonic *Axiochus*, a Hellenistic Platonic or Academic dialogue of disputed date<sup>59</sup>. The eschatology has strong ties to the mystery cults: in the nice part of the underworld, the εὐσεβῶν χώρος, there is eternal spring, sources of fresh water and flowery meadows, details known from Aristophanes *Frogs* and the Bacchic gold tablets, and “the initiated have some sort of special place”, τοῖς μεμνημένοις ἐστὶν τις προεδρία.

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<sup>57</sup> Plat. *Phaed.* 114a.

<sup>58</sup> Philodem. *On the Gods* I, col. 19, 19-23, see the edition and commentary by Diels 1926.

<sup>59</sup> Plat. *Axioch.* 371de. For a translation with a useful introduction see Hershbell 1981; the dates range from “not long after Plato's life-time”, Wycherley 1961: 160 to “nach Karneades,” Müller 1975: 75.



All this has been inscribed on two bronze tablets, brought by the Hyperborean Maidens to Delos; there, they were read by Gobryes, ἀνήρ μάγος who visited the island under Xerxes, to protect it from the Persian invasion and who is Socrates' witness for this eschatological narrative<sup>60</sup>. That is: yet another text connected, if not with Orpheus at least with an Apolline background, and told by a μάγος. Moreover, the situation of the entire small dialogue is suggestive: Socrates talks to old Axiochos who is on the brink of death and needs some comfort, since he is tormented by fear. Comfort comes from a philosopher who tells a mystery tale revealed by a μάγος.

One cannot but wonder, on several levels. Since the Derveni papyrus did not simply serve to kindle the pyre, its texts was supposed to bring some comfort to the nobleman burnt and buried there. Sarah treated some of the fears he might have had. There might have been others: I wonder whether the dead Macedonian was as afraid of the fire in the beyond as was the Athenian Axiochos, his social equal. If so, he had found comfort in the rites performed by a Bacchic μάγος and a book written by one of them with an ambitious intellectual outlook, destined to convey this sort of comfort through the correct explanation of the rituals and of Orpheus' theogonic Hymn.

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<sup>60</sup> On the strange bronze tablets Guthrie 1978: 396.

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