

THE FIGURE OF ORPHEUS IN ANTIQUITY  
AND THE MIDDLE AGES

Thesis for the Degree of Ph. D.  
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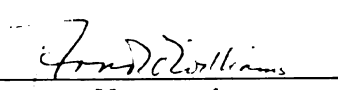
THE FIGURE OF ORPHEUS IN ANTIQUITY  
AND THE MIDDLE AGES

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## ABSTRACT

### THE FIGURE OF ORPHEUS IN ANTIQUITY AND THE MIDDLE AGES

by John Block Friedman

In this study I have tried to outline the ways in which writers and artists--from Hellenic antiquity through the high Middle Ages--have regarded the legend of Orpheus and Eurydice and the ways in which they have modified this legend to express certain religious, philosophical and literary beliefs of their own times.

The Introduction offers a "biography" of Orpheus assembled from representative classical authors. Chapter One deals with the way in which the Orpheus legend was used by Jewish and Christian apologetic writers. Chapter Two deals with the legend of Orpheus in Antique art, most particularly as a metaphor for the soul's ascent to the heavens in funerary art and magical gems. Chapter Three deals with the legend as it was allegorically interpreted by commentators on Boethius, on Ovid, and on various

ancient authors known to the Middle Ages. In the work of the medieval commentators Orpheus emerges as a figure representing reason and eloquence and Eurydice as the carnal concupiscence of man's nature. Chapter Four treats Orpheus and Eurydice as romance hero and heroine in medieval manuscript illustration and in Latin and English poetry, with special attention to the anonymous romance Sir Orfeo and to Robert Henryson's "Orpheus and Eurydice."

Perhaps the most interesting finding of my study lies in the interrelatedness of art and literature during late antiquity and the Middle Ages. During the period with which I have been concerned, iconography served as a source for some of the most imaginative modifications of the Orpheus legend, as for example, the identification of Orpheus with Christ. In the transmission of the Orpheus legend the picture was not only more memorable than the written word, it also had, upon occasion, the power to change the word to conform to a visual motif.

THE FIGURE OF ORPHEUS IN ANTIQUITY  
AND THE MIDDLE AGES

By

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## PREFACE

One day while looking through a moralized Ovid in order to find out what a 14th-century writer thought about the Golden Apples of the Hesperides, I saw the word pomum and stopped to read the context. I learned that Eurydice had been tempted by a forbidden fruit while gathering flowers, had been bitten by the devil in the form of a serpent and had been taken to the underworld. Reading on, I learned that someone called Orpheus-Christus went down to the lower world and took back his wife, that is, human nature, from the ruler of hell, greeting Eurydice with these words from the Canticles: "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away."

Not long after this I had occasion to look at a picture book of late Antique art. On one page was a picture of a Roman mosaic of Orpheus. He was perched on a rock, his tiny legs dangling; his eyes were large and compelling; his hand was raised as though to bless his lyre. The whole composition was studiously two-



dimensional and frontal. This page slipped past and I was looking at a manuscript illustration of Christ seated on a throne, his tiny legs dangling, his eyes lentile, his right hand raised as though to bless a book tucked up under his left arm. Christ, too, was flat, frontal and stylized. Were these works of art related to the story of Orpheus-Christus which I had read in Bersuire's moralized Ovid? I began the present study in an attempt to answer this question.

The friends of a man who is writing a book on an exotic subject tend to hide, I think, when they see him coming with a page in his hand. Like Casaubon, he thinks his work on fish-worship among the Urundi is the key to all mythologies--or one of the four pillars upon which Western civilization rests. But the friends are usually wrong and the author right, or apparently right. For as he examines an image or a commonplace of a culture he begins to see two things. First, he is amazed at the prevalence of the detail he is studying. He finds a fish-worshiper at every stream, who has been waiting patiently to be looked at for the last thousand years. Second, he sees that the object of his study is

like an iceberg or a weed; its great mass is submerged below the surface of history; past students have seen only the tip. Moreover, like a weed, an object of scholarly study, though it may have an insignificant stalk, has many roots, all intertwined with those of other weeds, and even roses, nearby. In writing this study I was struck by the number of places in which Orpheus was to be found and by the variety of other ideas with which his legend was intertwined. To trace the growth of his legend it was necessary to learn something about art history, archeology, Greek magic, Roman burial customs, Jewish and Christian apologists, Boethius and his commentators, musical cosmology, mythology, the medieval romance and Celtic legend. The study of Orpheus, therefore, has shown me much about antiquity and the Middle Ages as well.

I should like to express my appreciation to a number of people who have helped me in this study. Lawrence Ross of Washington University first taught me that poets looked at pictures. The late Adolph Katzenellenbogen of The Johns Hopkins University helped my understanding of medieval art. A grant from the

College of Arts and Letters of Michigan State University enabled me to go to the Warburg Institute for a summer of research. The staff of that institute were all helpful, most particularly A. A. Barb. The staff of the British Museum allowed me to take valuable photographs, and the librarians of the University of Michigan and Michigan State University aided me in getting the books I needed. The Director of this study, Arnold Williams, as a man and as a scholar, will always be for me a person to emulate. Any stylistic grace this work may have was provided by my wife.

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## INTRODUCTION

Of all the heroes of Greek legend perhaps only Heracles is a more familiar figure to us than is Orpheus. Heracles, a man of action, became enraged by his slow progress in the study of music, struck his teacher, Linus, with a lyre and killed him (Apollod. Bibl., II, iv, 9). We remember Orpheus, on the other hand, for his musical skill and for the beauty of his voice; his song could make the lion lie down with the lamb and draw "Iron tears down Pluto's cheek."

The story of Orpheus' descent to the underworld in search of Eurydice and of his unsuccessful attempt to bring her back to the world of the living has engaged as many modern minds as it has ancient. But the significance of this story--indeed the course of the narrative itself--has varied from age to age and from audience to audience. To those interested in the history of ideas a study of the Orpheus legend will reveal much about the evolution of Western literature and art. Beginning its long course in ancient Greece, the story of Orpheus



presents him successively as: the bearer of civilizing arts to mankind, a religious philosopher, an enemy of newly emerging Christianity, a figure for David and for Christ, a figure for the human soul in its search for perfection, a chivalric hero of Romance, a maker of concord among the four warring elements and, most recently, a faithful lover who believes that "love is as strong as death."

In this study I have tried to trace the development of the legend from its origins in pre-classical Greece to its flowering in England and Scotland during the high Middle Ages. Although at the time of the high Middle Ages in England the Renaissance on the continent had already begun, and there too Orpheus enjoyed wide popularity, this study must exclude humanistic treatment of his legend as belonging to a new and different chapter in the history of ideas. Since this study ends with the opening of the Renaissance, it must also omit consideration of the Greek mystery religions associated with Orpheus' name. These rites were unfamiliar to the Latin Middle Ages

and became of historical and then of philosophical interest only with the revival of Greek learning.<sup>1</sup>

Every student of Orpheus in classical antiquity will be indebted to the articles on him by K. Ziegler in Pauly-Wissowa, Real-Encyclopadie, and those in Roscher's Lexicon. In these two works almost every reference to Orpheus in classical literature is assembled. Classical, Antique, Byzantine and a few medieval texts concerning the life, deeds and writings of Orpheus are gathered conveniently for the interested reader in Otto Kern's Orphicorum Fragmenta (1922). A great deal of Kern's material and much of that in Pauly-Wissowa and Roscher deals with the Orphic rites. Since this study is concerned mainly with the transmission of the legend I have limited my discussion of the antique writers who cite Orpheus to those who give reasonably representative accounts of him, to those who may have contributed details

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<sup>1</sup>See D. P. Walker, "Orpheus the Theologian and Renaissance Platonists," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, XVI (1953) and Edgar Wind, Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance (London, 1958), Ch. IV. Other writers who have dealt with Orpheus in connection with the Greek Mysteries are: E. Maas, Orpheus (Munich, 1895); J. Harrison, Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion (Cambridge, 1922); E. E. Rohde, Psyche, Eng. ed. (London, 1925), and, most recently, I. M. Linforth, The Arts of Orpheus (Berkeley, 1941) and W. K. C. Guthrie, Orpheus and Greek Religion (London, 1952).



to the story in Ovid and Virgil, and to those who may have been known in one form or another to the writers and artists of the Middle Ages.

The chronological limits of this Introduction are set by the earliest literary reference to Orpheus of which I am aware, that of Alcaeus in the early years of the 7th century B.C., and by the latest writer who can rightfully be called classical, Sidonius Apollinaris, Bishop of Auvergne, who died three years after the sack of Rome in 476 A.D. Perhaps the simplest method of reviewing what the writers of antiquity knew or thought about Orpheus is to examine what they said about certain particulars of his life. In this Introduction, therefore, I have somewhat arbitrarily arranged these particulars in the following order: 1) when Orpheus lived, 2) his parents, 3) his place of birth, 4) his education, 5) his deeds and adventures, 6) his wife, 7) his death and translation to the stars. Some of these particulars are familiar to us from the accounts of Orpheus given by Ovid and Virgil. Perhaps it would be useful, before proceeding into a discussion of the more diverse particulars of Orpheus' life to be found in the ancient world, to review an eclectic but

representative account, and no better offers itself than that of Ovid's Metamorphoses supplemented by a few important variations from Virgil's poetry. This briefly is the story as it appears in Ovid:

When Orpheus married Eurydice in Thrace it was a time of great celebration, and Hymen himself presided over the wedding. After the ceremony Eurydice was walking with a company of naiads in a meadow when she was bitten by a snake and immediately died. Orpheus mourned her on earth for a time, then descended to Hades in search of her. Coming before Persephone, he at once acknowledged her power, made clear his peaceful intentions and petitioned her in song that the power of love be recognized as stronger than death, and that Eurydice be returned to him to finish her allotted time on earth. He sang his plea so beautifully that the torments of Tantalus, Ixion, Sisyphus and others of the dead momentarily ceased and the hearts of the Eumenides, Pluto and Persephone were won over. Eurydice came forward from among the other spirits and was united with Orpheus on the condition that he should not look back at her as he led her out of Hades. But, worrying lest she not be following, he did look back, and with a sad goodbye Eurydice vanished.

At this Orpheus tried to reenter Hades but was refused admission. After a week of mourning he returned to his home on Rhodope in Thrace. Three years passed and still he avoided women, either because of his loss or else because of his marriage vows. The Thracian women, many of whom loved him, were angered by this. Also, it is said that he was the first of the Thracians to love young boys (X, 1-85).

One day when Orpheus was playing his lyre on a hilltop many plants, trees and animals gathered around him, attracted by his song. He sang first of the wars of the Giants with Zeus, then of the love of the gods for boys and of the unusual lusts of women (X, 86-105, 143-154). And as he sang a band of Maenads came upon him. They thrust their spears at him but the leafy spear shafts were sympathetic and turned harmlessly aside. One Maenad threw a stone but it was charmed by his song and did him no harm. Eventually, however, the noise of the women's flutes, drums and howling overcame his music and the women at last killed him and drove off his audience. They threw stones, branches and their wands at the body and then, seizing the hoes and mattocks left by some neighboring workmen, cut the body of Orpheus to bits;

his head and lyre were thrown into the Hebrus and still made music as they floated towards Lesbos. All nature mourned for Orpheus. As his head reached the shore of Lesbos a snake seized it, but was turned to stone by Apollo.

Orpheus' soul united itself with that of Eurydice and now they walk through Hades, sometimes he, sometimes she in front. Bacchus punished the Maenads for having killed his priest by turning them into trees (XI, 1-66).

There are a number of briefer references to Orpheus in the works of Virgil,<sup>2</sup> with detailed accounts given in the fourth Georgic and in the Culex. The fourth Georgic may have served Ovid as a partial source, since he knew Virgil, and the Georgics (36-29 B.C.) were completed before the Metamorphoses (c. 10 A.D.). Virgil's account (G. IV, 453-558) begins as a castigation of Aristeus, a pastoral demi-god usually associated with Eurydice in medieval versions of the tale but not mentioned by Ovid. In this version the marriage is not described, but Eurydice is bitten by a snake as she

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<sup>2</sup>Aen. VI, 120; Ecl. III, 46, IV, 55, 57, VI, 30, VIII, 55.

flees Aristeus. After her death Orpheus mourns her for a time on earth and then descends to the underworld where, like Odysseus (Od. XI), he is greeted by the spirits of the dead. Virgil speaks of how the Eumenides and Cerberus were charmed by Orpheus' song, but he does not deal with the cessation of the torments of Hell. After his failure to return with Eurydice he mourns for seven months, not three years, by the river Strymon. Moreover, the story of his death at the hands of the Maenads is not so fully developed as it is in Ovid. The tale ends with his head floating down the waters of the Hebrus, still calling his wife's name. Finally, there is no suggestion in this story that Orpheus was homosexual.

Virgil's Culex (1.267 ff.) tells somewhat the same story. Here, however, in addition to the animals, the moon is so entranced by Orpheus' song that she fails to appear at night. The Culex emphasizes the boldness of Orpheus in thinking that he could propitiate the gods of Hades by his music, and his boldness in part arises from the fact that he charms the animals and trees before he goes to Hades to win back Eurydice.

Classical and Antique art, were equally important in the transmission of the story of Orpheus from

one generation and place to another. Pausanias mentions statues and wall paintings of Orpheus (III, xx, 5; IX, xxx, 4-12), as does Philostratus, who developed the literary genre of the ekphrasis or rhetorical descriptions of works of art (Imaq. II, 15). A metope from Delphi which may have been carved as early as the 5th century B.C. shows him as an Argonaut (Fig. 1), while there are also amusing accounts of sweating statues of Orpheus in the Alexander legends of Arrian (Anab. I, II) and in the Pseudo-Callisthenes (I, 42). There are extant a number of black and red figured vase paintings of the classical period showing Orpheus legends, as well as representations on seals, coins, and mirrors.<sup>3</sup>

For many writers in antiquity, the story of Orpheus' descent and his charming of the animals was of less importance than other abilities he was thought to have had. It is this less familiar side of Orpheus which I should like now to present briefly, both in order to give the readers some idea of the associations the legend had for antiquity and as an introduction to the details of his biography.

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<sup>3</sup> See the illustrations passim in Guthrie and particularly pp. 64-5 for a hand-list of Greek vases, their bibliography and descriptions.

Orpheus was thought to be an authority on the origins of things and a religious philosopher who wrote poems of cosmological and eschatological import, called collectively the Orphica (ed. E. Abel, 1885). W. K. C. Guthrie, in his excellent book, Orpheus and Greek Religion, has dealt extensively with the body of religious writing attributed to Orpheus. He points out that though "Orpheus was probably never, certainly scarcely ever worshipped as a god . . . he was a prophet and high priest of religion" (p. 41). Actually, the authenticity of the cosmogonic writings of Orpheus is a matter of some conjecture; it was quite common for neo-Platonic writers such as Porphyry to quote from poems purportedly by Orpheus in order to give antiquity to their own doctrines. Also, the neo-Platonists and other writers on the Greek mystery religions make reference to a Rhapsodic Theogony attributed to Orpheus but very likely of a date in the 2nd or 3rd century A.D.

Whether one assumes, as Guthrie does (Ch. I passim), that Orpheus was a real person and something of a reformer and proto-Christ in matters of the mysteries, or holds with R. S. Conway that "the name 'Orpheus' seems to have been a kind of professional epithet like 'Doctor' or

'Reverend,' applied to persons who wrote poems on Orphic subjects, which were always of a religious character" (Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, XVII, 1933, p. 68), the fact remains that there was a consistent body of cosmogonical speculation associated with the name Orpheus known to the ancient world. Orphic theories on the creation of the world and of man seem to derive from Hesiod's Theogony, dated by some critics (OCD) as early as the 8th century. Orphic doctrines are mentioned by the dramatists, Plato, Aristotle, Alexandrian and late Antique writers, and indeed are used in refutation of paganism by the early Christian apologists. With the establishment of Christianity in the West, however, the mystery religions are supplanted, and the figure of Orpheus becomes important for other reasons.

Roles more practical than those of philosopher and cosmogonist were also ascribed to Orpheus by the ancients. He was thought to have written a work on stones, the Lithica and Censorinus, a late Roman grammarian, speaks of him as an astrologer knowledgeable on the subject of the Great Year (D.N., 18, 11). Lucian says that he taught the Greeks astrology (De Astrol. 10). As a botanist Orpheus was highly regarded by Pliny.



Orpheus knew that there were aphrodisiac powers in the staphylinus and he was the first man to write on the subject of botany (HN II, 32; XXV, 12). A number of writers associated Orpheus with Pythagoras because both men, for rather different reasons, were opposed to the eating of flesh.<sup>4</sup> From his association with Pythagoras Orpheus became something of a mathematician. Iamblichus the neo-Platonist, in his Life of Pythagoras, observes that:

Orpheus the son of Calliope, having learned wisdom from his mother in the mountain Pangaëus, said that the eternal essence of number is the most providential principle of the universe . . . . It is the root of the permanency of divine natures. [Tr. Thomas Taylor, p. 78]

Perhaps the most important of all these talents are those which associate Orpheus with the Ars Scribendi. In his

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<sup>4</sup>Herodotus, II, 81, speaks of the Orphic practice of not bringing wool into temples, he says this is really a Pythagorean idea. In the Hippolytus of Euripides, Theseus says to his son, "Set out thy paltry wares/ Of lifeless food: take Orpheus for thy king" (l.952). Apuleius, Apol. in Works n.t. (London, 1886) said, "For wool . . . has ever been held to be an impure covering in conformity with the dicta of Orpheus and Pythagoras" (p. 304), as did Plutarch, Conv. Sept. Sap. 10, "But to refrain entirely from eating meat, as they record of Orpheus of old . . ." and Plato, Leg. VI, 782, "For in those days men are said to have lived a sort of Orphic life, having the use of all lifeless things, but abstaining from all living things."

guises of poet, musician, and rhetorician Orpheus later was to become important to the student of medieval literature. An epitaph by Damagetus mentions Orpheus as having invented "the yoked hexameter" (Anth. Pal. VII, 9). Diodorus of Sicily recounts a legend in which Apollo destroys the lyre after the flaying of Marsyas, remarking that Linus, Orpheus, and Thamyras rediscovered the strings and harmony of the lyre (III, 59). Alcidamas says that Orpheus invented the alphabet (Antipho, ed. Blass, 24, p. 190).

In presenting this sampling of legends connected with Orpheus I have attempted to show the reader who is familiar with only the Ovidian and Virgilian accounts a few of the associations Orpheus had for the men of antiquity. With such information in mind we may now consider in closer detail the biography of Orpheus.

### Conjectures of Antiquity as to

#### When Orpheus Lived

The most ancient allusions to Orpheus which I am aware of are those of Alcaeus and Sappho, from the 7th century B.C. Both references exist in very conjectural emendations of papyri. In an emendation by Diehl,

about which he later expressed doubt, Alcaeus speaks of how "Orpheus overcame allotted death by his speech, showing an escape to men who came after."<sup>5</sup> Sappho says:

[Death tracketh everything living and] catcheth it in the end, [and even as he would not give his] beloved wife [to Orpheus, so he ever] thinks to [keep prisoner every] woman that dies, . . ." (118A).

If these emendations are correct, the story of Orpheus' descent and dealings with Pluto and Persephone must have been well enough known to be used as literary allusions by 650 B.C. Of later date and better authority are the allusions to Orpheus in the poems of Simonides and Ibycus. Simonides seems to refer to Orpheus in some connection with the voyage of the Argonauts when he says that "Fishes leapt clean from the blue water because of his sweet music" (51). And Ibycus refers to the evident popularity of Orpheus by speaking of "Orphes of famous name" (10). Finally, Pindar calls him "that minstrel of the lyre, that father of songs" (Pyth. IV, 179-80). It can be concluded, I think, from these citations, that the story of Orpheus, particularly with

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<sup>5</sup>For the text of this fragment, see E. Diehl, Anth. Lyr. Graec. I, 80, p. 129. For Diehl's retraction see K. Freeman, Companion to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers (Oxford, 1953), p. 1.

reference to his descent to the underworld, was fairly well known in Greece before the 5th century.

Opinion in antiquity as to when Orpheus lived is divided. Aristotle felt that he never lived at all, though he is a dissenting voice.<sup>6</sup> Plato would put Orpheus "a thousand or two thousand years" before his own times (Leg. III, 677). Diodorus felt that "Orpheus was contemporary with Heracles, both of them living one hundred years before the period of the Trojan War" (VII, 1). This statement would place Orpheus on the low side of Plato's estimate since the fall of Troy was considered by Eratosthenes to have occurred in 1183 B.C. In keeping with certain accounts in which Orpheus is supposed to have taught men to eschew cannibalism<sup>7</sup> is that of Horace, who says that Orpheus lived "while men still roamed the woods" (Ars P. I, 392), in other words, before men lived in cities and had the advantages of civilization. The age when Homer lived was uncertain to

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<sup>6</sup>This opinion supposedly comes from the lost De Philosophia, and it is alluded to by Cicero, Nat. D. I, xxxviii, "Aristotle tells us that the poet Orpheus never existed . . ."

<sup>7</sup>Aristophanes, Ran. 1032, "First, Orpheus taught your religious rites,/ and from bloody murder to stay your hands . . ." So also Sextus, Math. I, 15.

the writers of antiquity, but most of those interested in chronologies and genealogies concur that Orpheus was a very distant ancestor of Homer. Proclus, for instance, in his Life of Homer claims that Homer and Hesiod descended some eight generations from Orpheus (ed. Allen, p. 99), while Charax of Pergamum would argue for ten generations (FGH III, 649, 20). The Suidas Lexicon says that Orpheus was born eleven generations before the Trojan war and that he was between nine' and eleven hundred years old at his death, which would put him somewhat within the estimate given by Diodorus. There are other attempts to date the age of Orpheus, such as that of Plutarch, who said that everyone imitated Orpheus but that he imitated no one since he was first (De Mus. 5), and Maximus of Tyre, who placed together in remote antiquity Homer, Hesiod, and Orpheus,<sup>8</sup> but essentially the main classical views as to his age have been given above.

Post-classical and early Christian writers sometimes attempt to date Orpheus in relation to various personages from the Old Testament. It had long been

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<sup>8</sup>The Dissertations of Maximus Tyrius, tr. Thomas Taylor (London, 1804), I, p. 76.



a device of Alexandrian Jews, taken over from them by the early Christian apologists, to claim that the Greeks had got their learning from Moses and from the Old Testament. An example of this point of view may be found in Eupolemius (c. 150 B.C.):

Moses was the first sage and the first to teach the Jews the alphabet, which the Phoenicians took from the Jews, and the Greeks from the Phoenicians . . .

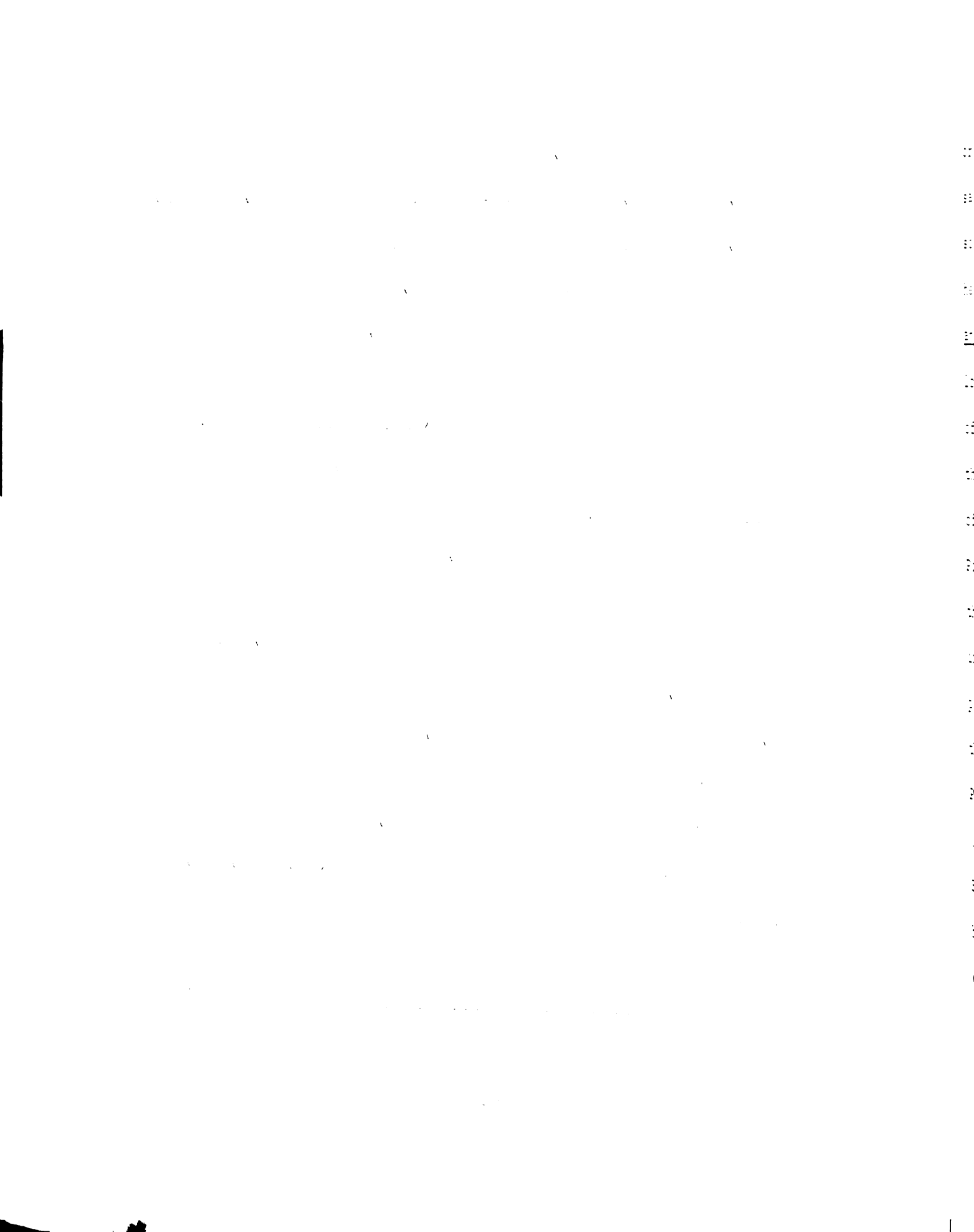
Another example may be found in Artapanus (c. 50 B.C.) who retells the story of Abraham as the first astrologer and of Moses, "called by the Greeks Musaeus," as the teacher of Orpheus (Eus., Praep. Evang., IX, xxvi, xxvii, PG 21, 431-2). Firmicus Maternus, the 4th century writer of a treatise on and defense of astrology before his conversion to Christianity, offers an example of this kind of historiography when he says that "omnia enim [matters astrological] . . . Abram, Orfeus et Critodemus ediderunt . . ." (Math. IV, Proem.). Clement of Alexandria, in a chronology of the pagans, would put Orpheus in the age of Acrisius, when "the exploits of Perseus and Dionysus took place, and Orpheus and Musaeus lived" (Strom. I, xxi, ANF, p. 423). While Tatian explains to the pagans that Moses is older than Homer and

the writers before him, older indeed than "linus . . . Amphion, Musaeus, Orpheus . . ." (Ad Gr. 41, ANF, p. 81), Orpheus, he says, following Diodorus, lived about the same time as Heracles. Theodoretus, while not attempting here to show his relation to Moses, does say that Orpheus is the first of the poets and that he lived a generation before the Trojan war (Gr. Cur Aff. II, 49). The Byzantine historian Georgius Cedrenus, in his Historiarum Compendium, gives several accounts of the time in which Orpheus lived. In one, Orpheus lived a little while after the famine which caused Abraham to travel into Egypt in his eighty-fifth year. In another, "Thracian Orpheus, the wisest and most renowned poet of Bacchus, lived in the time of Gideon," though somewhat later in his history Cedrenus places the rise of Orpheus among the Greeks in the time of Abdon, who was judge of Israel a little after the death of Gideon (PG, 121, 79, 134, 179).

### The Parents of Orpheus

The writers of antiquity were more unanimous about the parents of Orpheus. He was generally thought to be the son of the muse Calliope and of either Apollo





or Oeagrus. Pindar, our earliest source of information, said in an emended fragment (Frag. 139) that he was the son of Oeagrus, though in the fourth Pythian Ode he said he was the son of Apollo. The anonymous Contest of Homer and Hesiod, the substance of which has been dated as belonging to the 5th century B.C. spoke of Orpheus as born of Oeagrus and Calliope (315), while Timotheus wrote in the Persae of how "in the beginning did Orpheus the son of Calliope beget the motley-musicked shell on Mount Pieria" (II, 234-5). Plato remarked only that he was the son of Oeagrus (Symp. 179). Asclepiades of Tragilus in his scholia on Pindar weighed the question of Orpheus' parents at some length. He is reported to have believed that Orpheus was "the son of Apollo, Orpheus whom both Pindar himself and others say to be the son of Oeagrus" (FGH III, 168-9, 6a). In the scholia on the Rhesus of Euripides, Asclepiades added that "Calliope and Apollo having come together, they gave birth to Linus the oldest and three others beside him, Hymen, Ialemon and Orpheus" (6b). Another account of Apollo as the possible father occurs in Apollodorus (I, 3), but the body of evidence argues for Oeagrus. Oeagrus still allows Orpheus the standing of a demi-god since he himself was

a Thracian wine-god and son of Atlas, but it is really with the medieval commentators that Orpheus regains his true divinity as the most eloquent son of Apollo.

### Orpheus' Birthplace

The eloquence of Orpheus, given his background, was viewed with some suspicion as early as the 5th century. Aelian quotes Androtion to the effect that "Perhaps Orpheus was not learned, being a Thracian, and that myth gives him a false reputation" (VH, VIII, 6). The Athenians considered the Thracians a northern, backward, and uncivilized people and their familiar contempt for the "barbarians" is manifest in Androtion's remark. Nonetheless most Greek and Roman writers considered Orpheus to be both a Thracian and, at the same time, a man of great learning, piety, and inventiveness.

As a son of Calliope, Orpheus would naturally be associated with the home of the Muses on Mount Olympus at the border of Macedonia and Thessaly. So Damagetus, in an epitaph for Orpheus (Anth. Pal. VII, 9), speaks of him as being "buried here by the jutting foot of Thracian Olympus." Strabo says that "at the base of



Olympus is a city Dium. And it has a village near by, Pimpleia. Here lived Orpheus, the Ciconian" (VII, 18). Pimpleia was the home of Oeagrus as well as of Orpheus, according to Nonnos (Dion. XIII, 428), and Hyginus also places Orpheus in this vicinity as a native of "the city which is on Mount Olympus near the river Enipeus."<sup>9</sup> To place Orpheus on or near Olympus is to place him near the sources of art, learning, and eloquence. Such a neighborhood could, in part, explain the paradox of his role as both philosopher and Thracian. Diogenes Laertes, like Aelian disturbed by these two sides of Orpheus, observes in the Proemium to his Lives of Eminent Philosophers:

And thus it was from the Greeks that Philosophy took its rise: its very name refuses to be translated into foreign speech. But those who attribute its invention to barbarians bring forward Orpheus the Thracian, calling him a philosopher of whose antiquity there can be no doubt (5).

The question of Orpheus' nationality creates a problem for the Greek vase painters as well. Remembering that most classical accounts of Orpheus show him as somehow

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<sup>9</sup> The Myths of Hyginus, tr. Mary Grant (Lawrence, Kansas, 1960), XIV, p. 34. Quotations from Hyginus will be taken from this edition.



apart from the Thracians and a sojourner rather than a dweller in their land, we may understand why Greek vases often show Orpheus dressed in the clothes of a Hellene, sometimes singing to men who by their clothes are clearly Thracian.<sup>10</sup>

Though other writers locate him elsewhere in Thrace than Mount Olympus, they still portray Orpheus as the civilizer of a savage people. Conon tells us that he was the king of the Macedonians and the Odrysians and that his musical abilities contributed to his success as a ruler (PG 103, 582-3). Quintillian says that Orpheus was descended from the gods and calmed the unlettered and violent men of his land by the power of his music (Inst. I, 10.9), while the neo-Platonist Maximus of Tyre says that Orpheus was "born in Thrace, in the mountain Pangaeus, which is inhabited by those Thracians who are called Odrysi, a rustic race, given to plunder, and void of hospitality. The Odrysi, however, willingly followed Orpheus as their leader, being charmed by the beauty of his song. This, therefore,

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<sup>10</sup> Guthrie, fig. 5, p. 34 and pl. 6. Pausanias in his discussion of the famous painting by Polygnotus said, "The appearance of Orpheus is Greek, and neither his garb nor his head-gear is Thracian" (X, xxx, 6).





is the meaning of the assertion, that he drew rocks and trees, assimilating the ignoble manners of those that were allured to inanimate bodies."<sup>11</sup> Two geographers, Solinus and Mela, do not make Orpheus a Thracian. Solinus makes him a Sythonian of the seacoast of Pontus, while Mela would have him a resident of Obele, where he "first gave [the Maenades] orders, and trained them to that Religion [of Bacchus]."<sup>12</sup> Most of the references to Orpheus in classical and late Antique writing indicate only that he was a Thracian, though sometimes an Odrysian Thracian or a Ciconian. Often he is characterized by certain conventional poetic or metonymic epithets, such as Rhodian, from the mountain of that name in Thrace, Strymonian, from the river of that name, or Bistonian, from the tribe of that name. Such epithets tell the reader that Orpheus is a Thracian but do not tell specifically where in Thrace he lived. Thrax or Threicius are often used as epithets for Orpheus, and continue to be so used in medieval writing even when

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<sup>11</sup>Dissertations, II, p. 70.

<sup>12</sup>Collectanea Rerum Memorabilium, tr. A. Golding (London, 1587), sig. K4; The Worke of Pomponius Mela . . . Concerning the Situation of the Worlde, tr. ibid. (London, 1585), II, sig. F4.



the geographical significance of the word is lost or not clearly understood, as in this gloss on Lucan's Pharsalia by the 12th century teacher Arnulphus of Orleans: "TRACIUS a regione ubi violentior est."<sup>13</sup>

### The Education of Orpheus

It is natural that someone whose mother was a Muse and who was born on or near Mount Olympus should be knowledgeable in the arts and sciences, all the more so if he were also a world traveller. Thus it is with Orpheus. What we know about the education of Orpheus is this: that he learned about music and other matters from Calliope and Apollo and that he went to Egypt where he studied philosophy and, according to the Jewish controversialists and Christian apologists, learned of monotheism from Moses.

Diodorus of Sicily, who is the main source for the Egyptian travels of Orpheus, gives two somewhat contradictory accounts of his education. Egypt, he says, "was nevertheless eagerly visited by Orpheus and

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<sup>13</sup> Arnulfi Aurelianensis Glosule Super Lucanum, ed. Berthe M. Marti, Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome, XVIII (Rome, 1958), p. 53.



the poet Homer in the earliest times. . . . For they say that Orpheus, upon visiting Egypt and participating in the initiation and mysteries of Dionysus, adopted them . . ." (I, 23). Diodorus concludes thus:

Orpheus, for instance, brought from Egypt most of his mystic ceremonies, the orgiastic rites that accompanied his wanderings, and his fabulous account of his experience in Hades (I, 96).

Orpheus, however, did not go to Egypt as a very young man.

And after he had devoted his entire time to his education and had learned whatever the myths had to say about the gods, he journeyed to Egypt, where he further increased his knowledge and so became the greatest man among the Greeks . . . (IV, 25).

Yet in another place Diodorus says that Orpheus learned the mysteries from his father Oeagrus (IV, 43). Moreover, a third source of instruction for Orpheus, according to Diodorus, was his visit to the Idean Dactyls, those mysterious inventors of metal-working who were created from dust (V, 64).

That Egypt had a very ancient civilization was clearly recognized by Greek and Roman writers. Hecataeus, in his Aegyptica, regarded Egypt as the civilization from which cosmologists and philosophers from Orpheus to Plato

had borrowed. "For the priests of the Egyptians relate from the writings in the sacred books that those nearest them in antiquity were Orpheus and Musaeus . . ." (FGH III, 264, 61-2).

Lucian by implication rebuts the account of Diodorus when he says that:

as for the Greeks, they learned not a whit of astrology either from the Aetheopians or from the Aegyptians. It was Orpheus, the son of Oeagrus and Calliope, that first declared these matters unto them" (De Astrol. 10).

There are no other accounts of Orpheus' Egyptian education, that I know of, until the time of the Christian apologists. Then Eusebius, perhaps following Diodorus, says of the Phoenicians and Egyptians that:

they relate that it was Orpheus, the son of Oeagrus, who learned of the mysteries from the Egyptians and then taught them to the Greeks" (Praep. Evang. I, vi, 50).

Further on, Eusebius cites one Artapanus as saying that Moses was the teacher of Orpheus. Perhaps Artapanus felt that Moses, leading his people out of Egypt to Sinai, found time before his departure to instruct Orpheus in the true theology. An anonymous Byzantine writer, following Theodoretus (Gr. Cur Aff. II, 30), evidently felt so for he speaks of how "Odryasian Orpheus having learned

about the being of God in Egypt, in such a fashion understood it and spoke it" (Anecd. Ox. IV, 251).

The nature of Orpheus' Egyptian education seems to have differed according to the interests of the people discussing it, but those who said that Orpheus was in Egypt all appear to have agreed that his learning there was of a philosophical or theological cast. If we may trust the Orphic fragments collected by Kern and Guthrie, much of the learning of Orpheus had to do with the origins of things. Orpheus' name was associated with a body of thought which, very briefly, held that originally there were Night and Chaos, and that out of these came Phanes or Light, often thought of as Eros, who was a generative force. The similarity of such a view of creation to that of the book of Genesis which was attributed to Moses is readily apparent. It should not be surprising, therefore, that Orpheus' name be linked with that of Moses on theological as well as historical grounds. Lactantius Placidius, for instance, speaks in the same sentence of "Orpheus and Moses, the priest of the highest God, and Isaiah and others like them," who believed in a single God (Comm. ad Statii Theb., IV, 516). Guthrie, discussing the Orphic cosmogony, describes its similarity

to that in the book of Genesis as follows:

At one time Phanes, at another Zeus contained the seeds of all being within his own body, and from this state of mixture in the One has emerged the whole of our manifold world, and all nature animate and inanimate. This central thought, that everything existed at first together in a confused mass, and that the process of creation was one of separation and division . . . has been repeated . . . in many religions . . . . The best known example is our own Bible. "The earth was without form . . . . and God divided the light from the . . . . darkness . . . . and God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament" . . . . (p. 75).

Besides the learning he gained from his trip to Egypt, Orpheus also received instruction in music from Apollo and Calliope. Horace speaks of "tuneful Orpheus, who by the skill his mother had imparted stayed the swift course of the streams" (Carm. I, xii). The mythographer Hyginus, partly basing his account of Orpheus on the astronomical treatise of the Pseudo-Eratosthenes, tells us that "Apollo took the lyre, and is said to have taught Orpheus on it, and after he himself had invented the cithara, he gave the lyre to Orpheus" (p. 192). In the 4th century Aratea of Avienus, a Latin imitation of the Phaenomena of Aratus, we learn that "Apollo taught Orpheus to play the lyre



in a cave on Mount Pangaeus" (l.623). Virgil (G. IV, 509), Claudian (XXXI), and Sidonius Apollinaris (XXIII) mention Orpheus' singing in a cave, but say nothing of an accompanying teacher. This education in a cave well befits Orpheus who, as we shall see elsewhere, was supposed to have had prophetic powers as a result of his association with Apollo.

### The Deeds of Orpheus

"Not Orpheus but Philammon sailed with the Argonauts," said Pherecydes of Athens about 450 B.C., denying to Orpheus one of his most famous deeds (FGH I, 26, 68). The reasons for Pherecydes' statement are unclear since literary and artistic evidence suggests that the voyage was one of the earliest features of the Orpheus legend. Pherecydes is the only classical writer, as far as I know, who denies that Orpheus was among the Argonauts, though there are many who affirm it. In Apollonius Rhodius' Argonautica, Orpheus was among those who accompanied Jason on his voyage. Even before the ship got underway a quarrel arose among the chiefs and Orpheus resolved it with his song and lyre. It is

interesting that the song used to calm the quarrelers was a philosophical one which dealt with the beginnings of things.

He sang how the earth, the heaven and the sea, once mingled together in one form, after deadly strife were separated each from the other; and how the stars and the moon and the paths of the sun ever keep their fixed place in the sky . . ." (I, 32ff).

Orpheus' action here, and indeed his traditional presence on this voyage, calls to mind the Greek interest in *ῥέπειτρον*. It would have been very un-Greek to have portrayed a voyage, undertaken for whatever purpose, in which those who favored war and violence were not counterbalanced by a spokesman--like Odysseus on the Trojan expedition--for the Apollonian principles of order and moderation.

Orpheus does two other notable things on this voyage. He brings the Argonauts to Samothrace so that they may be initiated into the mysteries and, like Odysseus, saves them from the sweet songs of the Sirens.

And they were already about to cast from the ship the hawsers to the shore, had not Thracian Orpheus, son of Oeagrus, stringing in his hands his Bistonian lyre, rung forth the hasty snatch of a rippling melody so that their ears might be filled with the sound of his twanging; and the lyre overcame the maidens' voice" (IV, 20).

According to Hyginus, however, Orpheus was not totally successful in this stratagem, for "Butes, son of Teleon, though diverted by the singing and lyre of Orpheus, nevertheless was overcome by the sweetness of the Sirens' song" (p. 37).

While Apollodorus (I, 9), Diodorus (IV, 43), and Philostratus the Younger (Imag. II) say only that Orpheus was on the voyage, several Greek and Roman writers allude to acts performed by him while he was with the Argonauts. In a scholium on the Argonautica Herodorus of Heracleia is said to have asked:

Why, since Orpheus was a weakling [did he sail] with the heroes? It was because Cheiron was a seer and knew they could not get past the Sirens unless Orpheus sailed with them (FGH I, 31, 224).

To Lucian and others Orpheus was the coxwain of the Argo. Euripides said that Orpheus' lyre gave "the rowers a measure for their long sweep of oars," (Hyps. LXIV), while Valerius Flaccus told how Orpheus himself did not row but taught "the oars to swing, that they clash not everywhere upon the surface of the tide" (Arg. I, 490). According to Antipater of Sidon, Orpheus had power over tide, wind, and rain (Anth. Pal. VII, 8); for Statius, his voice drew the waves to the ship (Theb.

V, 343); for Philostratus, his voice calmed the turbulence of the sea (Imaq. II, 15); while for Silius Italicus,

when the Argo at Pagasae refused to launch out on the blue water which on land she had never known, the sea, summoned by the lyre, obeyed the music and came up to the stern of the sacred bark" (Pun. XI).

As for Orpheus' deeds on land, the two most famous are of course the charming of the animals and the descent to the underworld. There is almost no difference between the accounts of these actions given by classical and late Antique writers and the accounts given by Ovid and Virgil above. It is only with the allegorical interpretations given to the descensus ad inferos and the charming of the animals in Late Antiquity and in the Middle Ages that these stories begin to be recounted differently. Since this study deals with the allegorists in another place, suffice it to say here that both actions were associated with Orpheus as early as the 7th century B.C. Orpheus in the underworld was mentioned by Sappho (118A), and he is pictured on a 7th century kylix surrounded by the animals (M. P. Nilsson, HTR XXVIII, 1935, 188n); these two deeds of Orpheus were to become commonplaces in the Antique world.

Only one treatment of his charming of the trees, a Euhemeristic account of the 4th century B.C., deviates significantly enough from the version widespread in antiquity to deserve special mention. Palaephatus, attacking the fabulous nature of Greek myth, wrote that "false also is the story commonly heard about the poet Orpheus, namely that animals, birds and trees followed him as he played the lyre." Palaephatus then goes on to tell how the Bacchantes at one time took livestock and food and left their village to go to the mountains. The men of the village, fearing for their women, asked Orpheus to bring them down from the mountains, which he did with his lyre. The women came down bearing branches from the trees and the witnesses to this event thought the trees themselves were moving to his song.<sup>14</sup>

Palaephatus takes quite a modern approach to myth, and his method suggests the view of myth as history held in the Renaissance and 18th century. We will recall that Euhemerus of Messene argued that the gods of popular worship had originally been great kings and

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<sup>14</sup>De Non Credendis Fabulosis Narrationibus in Hyginii . . . Fabularum Liber (Paris, 1578), p. 120.

conquerors, inventors and partisans, who had been deified by a grateful people. For example, Ceres was made a goddess because she introduced the cultivation of grain. So too, Bacchus for viniculture. Euhemerism lay behind the attacks of Clement of Alexandria (Protr. II) and other Christian apologists on the pagan gods, and its historical emphasis gave rise to the serious scientific study in the late 17th and early 18th centuries of myth as a revelation of the "primitive" mentality.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to his enchantment of the animals and his descent to the underworld, Orpheus was a philosopher, a religious innovator, a poet and a musical theorist. He was often considered by the ancients a systematic philosopher who had gained his wisdom from the gods themselves. Julian, for instance, spoke of him as "the most ancient of all the inspired philosophers" (Or. VII, 216). Moreover, there was a legend that Orpheus, like Moses, had committed his inspired wisdom to certain sacred tablets, "the tablets of Thrace"

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<sup>15</sup> See Frank Manuel, The Eighteenth-Century Confronts the Gods (Cambridge, Mass., 1959) for a superb discussion of Euhemerism.

of which Euripides makes mention in the Alcestis (1.965). Most writers stress the philosophic content as well as the loveliness of his verse, and some see him mainly as a philosophical poet. As Plutarch relates, "formerly the philosophers used to publish their doctrines and discourses in the form of poems, as Orpheus, Hesiod, Parmenides . . ." (De Pyth. Or., 10).

Orpheus' philosophic and religious activities were often blended into his role as prophet. Like his philosophic knowledge, his prophetic insights were supposed to have been the result of his association with the gods. There was a tradition, supported mainly by Pseudo-Eratosthenes and Hyginus and alluded to by Nican-  
der in his Therica, that Aeschylus wrote a lost trilogy, one play of which was called the Bassarides.<sup>16</sup> In this play, according to the mythographers, the poet tells how Orpheus abandoned the worship of Dionysus to become a worshipper of Apollo, whom he identifies with Helios, the sun. As a result of his apostasy Orpheus is killed by the Bacchantes. This legend has a number of important

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<sup>16</sup>References and discussion may be found in H. Weir-Smythe's Loeb Classical Library edition of Aeschylus, II.

ramifications. Not the least important is the association of Orpheus with a legalistic, rational and orderly god, with all of the implications that this has for his later role as a figure for concord, divine order and the life of the spirit. The conjunction of Orpheus and Apollo, besides being attributed to Aeschylus and appearing in the genealogists mentioned earlier, takes still other forms in antiquity. A curious etymological speculation is to be found in Aelian. Describing a certain harbor he says, "there is a shrine of Apollo there, and the priest of this god scatters the flesh of calves that have been sacrificed to the god, and Sea-perch *ὀρφίς* come swimming up in shoals and eat the flesh" (NA, XII, 1). Polycharmos is another source for the idea of *ὀρφίς* as a fish sacred to Apollo (FGH IV, 1, 179). The comic possibilities of this etymology are explored by Athenaeus in a discussion of writers associated with fish. "And Callimedon the Crayfish came along with Orpheus Sea-Perch" (VIII, 340).

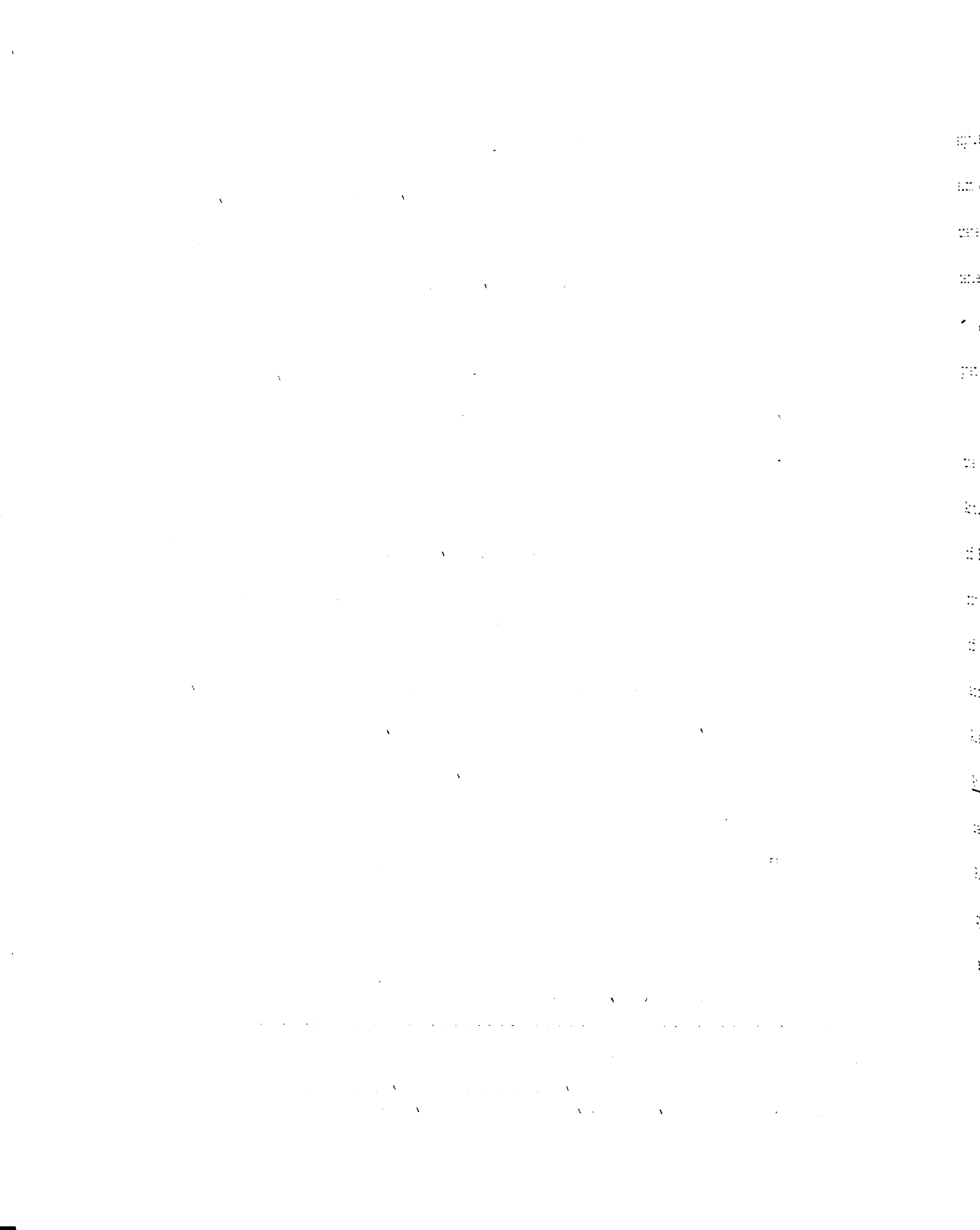
Whatever the nature of his association with Apollo, there is no doubt that Orpheus gained mantic powers from the God. After Orpheus was dismembered by the Maenads, his head floated down the Hebrus and



Apollo saved it from a snake. Various legends tell of how the head floated up to an island, usually Lesbos, where the people entombed it or built a temple over it. Antigonos of Carystus (FGH IV, 459) and Phanocles say<sup>17</sup> that the head rewarded them by making Lesbos and its people the most musical of all. More important, however, were the oracular powers assigned to the buried head. Philostratus says that the head gave oracles from a cave on Lesbos and that people came to hear it from as far as Babylonia (Heroica, 704). Conon remarks that the tomb of the head became a temple (583). The story of the temple is developed at some length by Philostratus in his Life of Apollonius of Tyre. Apollonius, we are told, among his many adventures, "also visited in passing the shrine of Orpheus, when he had put in at Lesbos. And they tell that it was here that Orpheus once upon a time loved to prophesy . . ." Philostratus goes on to tell how Apollo had become angry at the presence of a competitor and ordered the newly arrived head to go elsewhere (IV, 14). Plato speaks scornfully of

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<sup>17</sup>Phanocles' poem on the death of Orpheus may be found in J. Stobaeus, Locī Communes, Sacri et Profani (Frankfort, 1581), Sermo CLXXXV, p. 62.



sophists who pretend to be "hierophants and prophets, such as Orpheus and Musaeus . . ." (Prt. 316). Demosthenes calls him "that prophet of our most sacred mysteries" (Or. XXV, 8), and for Philochoros he was "  $\kappa\alpha\iota$  ποιητὴς καὶ προφῆτης " both poet and prophet (FHG III, 328, 77).

The prophetic powers of Orpheus were to become the materials for romance in the Hellenistic and late Antique periods just as his musical abilities and love of Eurydice furnished subject matter for the medieval romance Sir Orfeo and the Renaissance pastoral drama of Poliziano. One of the most charming Hellenistic accounts of Orpheus as a prophet is that found in the Alexander legend. The omen given to Alexander in the Anabasis of Arrian by a sweating statue has already been mentioned. Such a statue is also a feature of Plutarch's Alexander (14). In the life of Alexander by the Pseudo-Callisthenes this detail is much elaborated.

Then he [Alexander] went to the Pierian city of Bebrycia where there was a temple and a statue of Orpheus and standing near him the Pierian Muses and the wild beasts. And when Alexander looked at the statue of Orpheus, the wooden image sweat on the forehead and the whole body. When Alexander asked what

this sign meant, the soothsayer Melampous said to him: "King Alexander, you will grow weary from sweat and toil in subduing the tribes of the barbarians and the cities of the Greeks and travelling among wild beasts. But Orpheus by playing his lyre and singing won over the Greeks and by his sweet words turned the barbarians to love and tamed the wild beasts." (Life of Alexander of Macedon, tr. Haight, p. 52)

There is evidence that indeed Hellenistic and late Antique temples contained statues of Orpheus. Pausanias, usually an accurate observer of the life of his times, says that at Elis (V, xxvi) and Therae (III, xx), there were temples which contained such statues. Aelian Lampridius tells us that the emperor Severus Alexander wished to ensure his salvation in all quarters. In his temple were statues of "Christ, Abraham, Orpheus, and others of this same character" (S.H.A., Alex. Sev., 29).

Orpheus was also regarded by the ancients as a magician and healer. Pliny, as stated earlier, said that Orpheus was the first botanist. From his association with botany came the skill in healing drugs to which Euripides refers in the Alcestis (1.965). Pausanias tends to take a skeptical view of Orpheus' more marvelous exploits and offers the Euhemerist argument

that he rose to prominence because he had, among other abilities, the power to purify men of sin and to cure diseases (IX, xxx). He was superior in healing powers, some thought, because he had secret knowledge. Strabo says that Orpheus was both a real person and a magician.

Here [in Pimpleia] lived Orpheus, the Ciconian, it is said--a wizard who at first collected money from his music, together with his soothsaying and his celebration of the orgies connected with the mystic initiatory rites, but soon afterwards thought himself worthy of still greater things and procured for himself a throng of followers and power. Some, of course, received him willingly, but others, since they suspected a plot and violence, combined against him and killed him. (VII, 18)

Other writers give more qualified assent to the idea that Orpheus was a magician. Apuleius held that any person who looked deeply into the nature of things was bound to be called a magician by the vulgar, but then, of course, he is writing an apologia for magic (Apol. 27). Pliny, like Androtion referred to earlier, is suspicious of Orpheus' Thracian origins.

I should have been inclined to think that Orpheus had been the first to introduce into a country so near his own, certain magical superstitions based upon the practice of medicine, were it not for the factor that Thrace, his native land, was at that time totally a stranger to the magic art. (HN XXX, 2, Bohn Lib. ed. p. 423)

One writer allows Orpheus his magic powers, but takes away his musical pre-eminence. Pausanias speaks of an "Egyptian who thought that Amphion and the Thracian Orpheus were clever magicians, and that it was through their enchantments that the beasts came to Orpheus" (VI, xx). But Nicander, in the Therica, claims that Orpheus not only attracted oaks to him by his powers, but brought them with him to "the snow-crested mountains of Zone . . ." (Poems, tr. A. Gow and A. Schofield, p. 59).

While there was a general agreement in antiquity that Orpheus had great ability with lyre and voice, there were some who questioned the legend of Orpheus the poet. Pausanias allows that he was a poet, but not necessarily a divinely inspired one, rather he was an excellent verse maker. But in another place he says of the Orphica that though they are assigned to Orpheus by tradition, he feels that this tradition is incorrect<sup>18</sup> (I, xv). Diogenes Laertes was skeptical about Orpheus

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<sup>18</sup>For a contrary opinion, see that of Alexis, a 4th century comic writer in Athenaeus IV, 164. ". . . and at your leisure, you shall read. Orpheus is there, Hesiod, tragedies, Choerilus, Homer, Epicharmus, histories of all sorts."

as a philosopher and as a poet. In his Life of Pythagoras he remarks that the philosopher "ascribed some poems of his own making to Orpheus" (p. 327). Other writers mention a person named Onomacritus who, in some stories, was a descendant or pupil of Orpheus and the editor of Orphica, or, in other accounts, wrote the Orphica himself. The latter view was held mainly by late Antique and Byzantine writers. Both Tatian and Clement refer to Onomacritus as the author of the Orphica. The scepticism of the apologists, however, is to be distinguished from the scepticism of the pagan writers. The war against the pagans was in part a war of attrition. To strip a character from pagan mythology of his attributes or to impugn his inventions was to reduce him in dignity and to cast doubt on his divinity. Such strategy is evident in the later writers. Tatian observed "it was said that all the works attributed to [Orpheus] were composed by Onomacritus the Athenian, who lived during the reign of the Pisistratids, about the fiftieth Olympiad" (Ad Gr., 41, ANF, p. 81). Clement says the same thing but goes even further in discrediting the reputation of Orpheus by adding, "Ion of Chios relates in the Triagmi, that

Pythagoras ascribed certain works [of his own] to Orpheus . . . the Crateres of Orpheus [was] the production of Zopyrus of Heraclea" (Strom. I, xxi, ANF, p. 436). A similar position is taken by the 6th century A.D. Byzantine commentator on Aristotle's De Anima, John Philoponos.

The writings in use among those calling themselves Orphics were not the words of Orpheus, as he [Aristotle] says himself in the De Philosophia. He says these opinions of Orpheus were put into writing by Onomacritus" (Arist. Fr. 28).

Antiquity offers little information about the musical innovations of Orpheus. For example, though we know that Orpheus was skillful with the lyre beyond all men, and that, according to some writers, he composed songs on it, only one ancient writer, Timotheus, says that Orpheus invented it (Persae, 234-5). Usually the invention of the lyre was ascribed to Mercury, as in the Homeric hymn to Hermes, though Hyginus says that Hermes in turn gave the lyre to Orpheus (Poet. Astr., p. 191). Several writers attest to Orpheus' contributions to the science of harmony. According to Diodorus, Orpheus was among those who rediscovered the harmony of the lyre by adding certain strings--Orpheus' contribution



being the lowest string--after the flaying of Marsyas and breaking of the lyre by Apollo (III, 59). Avienus, following Hyginus and the Pseudo-Eratosthenes, says that Orpheus increased the number of strings in the lyre to make them correspond to the number of the Muses (Aratea, 11.624-5).

### The Wife of Orpheus

Some writers say that the wife of Orpheus was named Eurydice, one calls her Agriope and others do not name her at all. It will become clear, however, as we examine the legends of Orpheus and his wife, that in the Hellenic period there was very little interest in her. Most writers did not bother to name her; vase-paintings usually show Orpheus charming the Thracians or being killed by the Maenads rather than returning with Eurydice from Hades, and when we do find writers who describe the descent of Orpheus, their emphasis seems to be more on his attempts to charm the gods of the underworld than on the object of his quest. In the Augustan writers Virgil and Ovid, and in the late Antique writers who follow them, there is much greater interest

in the relations between Orpheus and Eurydice and in the pathos of her return to Hades. Moreover, there seems in these later writers to be no question that Orpheus' wife was named Eurydice. The reader may well ask why this should be, since the legend of Orpheus' descent appears to go back to remote antiquity and would have had time to be amply developed. The reason, in part, may lie in the difference of the classical from the Alexandrian and Augustan views of the relations between men and women. Misogyny, the low social position of women, and a greater interest in action than in feeling may lie behind the classical disinterest in the wife of Orpheus. As an Argonaut Orpheus was a man among men, as a philosopher he was the friend of the Muses and the gods, and as a musician he was surrounded by animals, trees, and the wild, uncivilized Thracians. This was enough to interest the Greeks.

In the court of the Ptolemies, however, the social and political power of women, as well as the highly sophisticated court life itself, contributed to an interest in a more psychological and amorous literature. The Alexandrian poets used the stories of classical mythology as their sources, but emphasized



the loves, rather than the wars, of the gods and demi-gods. Mars in the net with Venus instead of on the battlefield pleased the patrons of this literature. The Alexandrian influence is evident in Ovid's Metamorphoses and in Virgil's treatment of the Orpheus legend in the fourth Georgic and the Culex, and since these two poets codified the legend to some degree, it is not surprising that the poets who came after them were equally interested in the romantic elements of the story. In the literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and indeed in our own age, for instance in Cocteau's "Orphée," Orpheus was to become more widely known as a lover than a philosopher or an Argonaut.

Sappho, so far as I know, makes the first extant reference to the wife of Orpheus in the emended fragment discussed above, but does not name her (118a). So too, three 5th century writers speak of Orpheus' wife but do not name her. The first of these, Euripides, speaks of Orpheus' descent to Hades in search of his wife in the Alcestis, but in spite of his interest in the psychology of love, he offers no further information. In this play a character says, "But, were the tongue and strain of Orpheus mine,/ To witch Demeter's

Daughter and her lord,/ And out of Hades by my song to win thee . . ." (p. 435). Euripides seems to suggest here that the story ended happily, with Orpheus returning with his wife to the upper world. Plato mentions the same story but gives it a somewhat different interpretation.

But Orpheus, the son of Oeagrus, the harper,  
[the gods] sent empty away, and presented to  
him an apparition only of her whom he sought,  
but herself they would not give up, because  
he showed no spirit; he was only a harp-player  
and did not dare like Alcestis to die for love,  
but was contriving how he might enter Hades  
alive . . . (Symp. 179)

The third writer, the orator Isocrates, is even more terse about the wife of Orpheus than Euripides or Plato. He says only that Orpheus "led the dead back from Hades" (Or. XI, 8). Though none of these three writers supplies much information about the wife of Orpheus, two at least suggest that in their time there was a legend of Orpheus which had a happy ending. Hermesianax of Colophon, a 4th century writer who survives in the Deipnosophists of Athenaeus, also gives credence to such a version (Ath. XIII, 597), as does Moschus in his lament for Bion (III, 122). In all the later accounts Orpheus is forced to return to the upper world alone because he looks back.

The fact that Isocrates, Plato and Euripides do not name the wife of Orpheus is all the more curious in that Orpheus had been linked with Eurydice in Greek art as early as 400 B.C. A 5th century relief shows the two sadly taking leave of each other as Hermes stands by (Fig. 2). The characters are clearly labeled, and even if the incised names above the figures were added later, the attributes of Orpheus and Hermes, as well as the fact that Hermes, as the psychopompos, holds the woman by the hand, leave no doubt as to the iconographic meaning of the relief.

Most of the later writers who allude to Orpheus' wife name her, except for a few such as Diodorus, Statius, or Valerius Flaccus. The chronological position of these three men in relation to Ovid and Virgil makes it almost impossible that they should not have known that Orpheus had a wife named Eurydice.

Hermesianax, mentioned above, provides the only exception to Eurydice's name; in his version of Orpheus' descent to Hades and his successful return, the woman is named Agriope or Wild-eyed (Ath. XIII, 597). Though there may have been others who held that this was her name, the identification by Hermesianax is the only

such reference to have survived.

For writers from the 2d century B.C. on, Eurydice was the wife of Orpheus. Eurydice was apparently a very common name in antiquity and women with this name were the wives of other well-known mythological persons. The Cypria, a poem in the epic cycle, mentions that "Eurydice was the wife of Aeneas" (ed. Allen, p. 124). This same identification is made in a painting by Polygnotus, mentioned by Pausanias (X, xxvi). And, of course, Eurydice was also the wife of Creon in the Antigone of Sophocles.

The earliest writer to name Eurydice as the wife of Orpheus was Moschus, in his poem on the death of Bion. Moschus, who lived about the 2d century B.C. said that the story ended happily for "she [Persephone] granted Orpheus his Eurydice's return because he harped so sweetly" (III, 122). Another 2d century writer, Apollodorus says, in his discussion of Orpheus, that "when his wife Eurydice died, bitten by a snake, he went down to Hades, being fain to bring her up . . . ." (I, 3). The legend in the Library must have been based on a still earlier and, evidently, well-known version of the myth, since Apollodorus was a compiler rather

than a writer of myth. There are several other references to Eurydice in Greek and Roman literature but they are all about the same in content and offer no information on the life of Eurydice before her marriage. Only Valerius Flaccus, in his Latin version of the Argonautica of Apollonius, treats of her before her death, and he gives us a rather domestic Eurydice who, as the Argonauts are about to push off on their voyage, clings sadly to the neck of the departing Orpheus (II).

#### Orpheus' Death and Translation to the Stars

Orpheus attempted to save a woman from death and he met death at the hands of women. The story familiar to us from Ovid, of how he was dismembered by the Maenads because he scorned their advances, is perhaps the most common account of his death. There are, however, other versions, as well as other reasons for his destruction by the Maenads, advanced by the writers of antiquity. One such alternative reason is recounted in the Metamorphoses. There Ovid adds parenthetically that some say it was because Orpheus introduced homosexual love into Thrace that the women of the country



killed him. This story was a relatively late addition to the Orpheus legend, for aside from Ovid, only Hyginus (Poet. Astr. II, 7) passes it on.<sup>19</sup>

Ovid's probable source for Orpheus' interest in boys was a poem by the Alexandrian writer Phanocles, which, since it is a representative Alexandrian treatment of the myth as well as a curious legend about Orpheus, bears repeating here.

. . . and Orpheus, the son of Thracian Oeagrus, loved Calais, the son of Boreas, with all his heart, and went often in shaded groves still singing of his desire, nor was his heart at rest. But always, sleepless cares wasted his spirits as he looked at fresh Calais. The Bistonides, sharpening their long swords, ringed him in and killed him because he was the first in Thrace to desire men and to disapprove the love of women. And they cut off his head with their bronze swords, and fastening it to his lyre with a nail, they threw it at once into the Thracian sea in order that it might be carried away by the sea; and the head and lyre together were washed in the blue-green waves. And the sea put the head and lyre, still together, ashore at the sacred city of Lesbos. The sound of the clear-toned lyre reached both to the sea and the other islands, and to the shore where the rivers flow into the sea, and there on the shore men buried the clear-toned head of Orpheus, and put into

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<sup>19</sup> The remark in the Clementine Homilies, ANF VIII, p. 259 that "Apollo [was in love with] . . . Orpheus," suggests that the author may not have had too clear an idea who Orpheus was, though of course, it may possibly allude to a tradition of a homosexual Orpheus.

the tomb the clear-toned lyre as well, which had prevailed over both the dead rocks and the bitter waters of Phorcus. After this, the island had both songs and the lovely art of harping, and of all islands it is the most tuneful. And when the Thracian sons of Ares learned the women's wild acts, they were greatly distressed and they branded their wives in order that they would have a dark place, or tattoo, in the flesh of their bodies lest they ever forget their terrible crime. They branded the women with a vengeance for the killing of Orpheus, which has continued to this day on account of their crime. (See n. 17)

Apparently Phanocles confused a custom with a curse.

The Thracians were well-known for their practice of tattooing themselves. So in an anonymous epitaph in the Greek Anthology

The fair-haired daughters of Bistonia shed a thousand tears for Orpheus dead, the son of Calliope and Oeagrus; they stained their tattooed arms with blood, and dyed their Thracian locks with black ashes. (VII, 10)

It is not clear whether the writer thinks they mourned Orpheus in this fashion after they came to their senses or whether they were guiltless of his death. Plutarch alludes to the punishment given the Thracian women for killing Orpheus, but he does not say why they killed him in the first place. He says, however, that in his own time Thracian men still tattooed their wives, "in revenge for Orpheus" (DeSera, 12).

Hyginus offers another explanation of Orpheus' death at the hands of the Maenads.

Some also have said that Venus and Proserpine came to Jove for his decision, asking him to which of them he would grant Adonis. Calliope, the judge appointed by Jove, decided that each should possess him half the year. But Venus, angry because she had not been granted what she thought was her right, stirred all the women in Thrace by love, each to seek Orpheus for herself, so they tore him limb from limb. (p. 192)

He also alludes, following Pseudo-Eratosthenes, to the explanation of Orpheus' death supposed to have been dramatized by Aeschylus in the lost Bassarides (p. 191). In that version, Orpheus was killed for having deserted Dionysus for Apollo.

Strabo, Conon and Pausanias interpret the actions of the Maenads somewhat differently from Hyginus. Strabo's view, quoted earlier, was that Orpheus was too fond of power and that he was killed for this reason by his followers, who were initiated into the Dionysian mysteries, but who were not specifically women. Though the ambitious or priggish side of Orpheus' character was very little stressed in antiquity, Plato wrote slightly of him and Pausanias alludes directly to such a tradition. "But they say that Orpheus, [was]

a proud man and conceited about his mysteries . . ."

(X, vii). Conon gives an elaborate account of the death and says that he was killed by the women of both Thrace and Macedonia because he would not allow them to participate in his religious rituals (583). Pausanias lists a number of versions of Orpheus' death which were then current. In one, "the women of the Thracians plotted his death because he had persuaded their husbands to accompany him in his wanderings" (IX, ~~xxx~~).

There are Promethean overtones to the stories of Orpheus' death as given by these three authors, and there is evidence in the literature of the ancients that Zeus was considered to have killed Orpheus because he gave men forbidden knowledge. Pausanias alludes to yet another tradition about his death.

Some say that Orpheus came to his end by being struck by a thunderbolt, hurled at him by the god because he revealed sayings in the mysteries to men who had not heard them before. (IX, ~~xxx~~)

Diogenes Laertes, who disapproved of Orpheus, says that, traditionally, Orpheus:

. . . met his death at the hands of women; but according to the epitaph at Dium in Macedonia he was slain by a thunderbolt; it runs as follows: Here have the Muses laid their minstrel true,/ The Thracian Orpheus whom Jove's thunder slew. (5)



This epitaph, moreover, exists independently in the Greek Anthology (VII, 617). Isocrates explains that though Orpheus met his death through being torn apart by the women of Thrace, the reason for it was that Orpheus had "made a point of rehearsing these tales of the doings of the gods" (Or. XI, 39).

Finally, there are several explanations of Orpheus' death which, judging by the infrequency with which they were mentioned, must have had little currency in antiquity. Orpheus, for example, is said by some writers to have killed himself. Pausanias mentions this view (IX, xxx), and is perhaps following Agatharchides of Cnidos, who lived about two hundred years before him and who had said substantially the same thing (quoted in Comes, Mythologiae, VII, xiv, p. 769). That some writers may have felt that Orpheus was killed by animals is hinted at in two epigrams by Martial which deal with the Spectacula presented in the Colosseum during the reign of Titus (Spect. xxi, xxi b). Generally we think that the first pastoral interlude with Orpheus as a hero was that written by Poliziano in the 15th century. But this was not the case. Martial speaks of an elaborate entertainment, evidently with scenery,

presented in the Arena before Titus. In this entertainment the story of Orpheus was dramatized and at the end Orpheus "fell, mangled by an ungrateful bear" (xxi). In the second epigram a similar entertainment is described in which a bear came out of the ground, sent by Eurydice to attack Orpheus (xxi b). It is difficult to determine from these two poems whether those responsible for the staging of the Spectaculum were attempting to add new interest to an old legend and at the same time make use of an animal which would be in the Arena for other purposes, or whether there really were stories about Orpheus being injured or killed by the animals he sought to charm. Martial takes pains, however, to point out to the Emperor, in his explanation of the entertainment, that the detail of the bear was not something ordinarily part of the legend of Orpheus: "This thing alone was done untold by history" (xxi). In the absence of earlier legends of this sort about Orpheus and the animals, I think we must conclude that the presence of the bear was a bit of good stage-craft which had little or nothing to do with traditional accounts of the death of Orpheus.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> An instance of a semi-dramatic treatment of the Orpheus legend is mentioned in Varro, Rust., III,

Of stories about the fate of Orpheus after his death there are two general classes. First, a collection of legends deals with his head and lyre in their journeys by water. We have already alluded to these stories.<sup>21</sup> The second group deals with the translation of Orpheus to the heavens. Most of the stories in this group derive ultimately from the Phaenomena of Aratus and the Catasterismi of the Pseudo-Eratosthenes. Hyginus, in his work on the constellations, gives a nice account based on these two writers. It may be considered as representative of the legends which place Orpheus in the heavens after death.

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13. The author speaks of a feast in a game preserve in Laurentum: "In it was a high spot where was spread the table at which we were dining, to which he [the host] bade Orpheus be called. When he appeared with his robe and harp, and was bidden to sing, he blew a horn; whereupon there poured around us such a crowd of stags, boars and other animals . . ."

<sup>21</sup>Pausanias tells a curious story which appears to be a conflation of the legends of Antigonus and Phanocles. "The Libethrians, it is said, received out of Thrace an oracle from Dionysus, stating that when the sun should see the bones of Orpheus, then the city of Libethra would be destroyed by a boar . . . . About midday a shepherd was asleep against the grave of Orpheus, and even as he slept he began to sing poetry of Orpheus in a loud and sweet voice . . ." Awakening, he knocked over the urn, exposing the bones and the city was overcome by the river Sys (IX, xxx).



The lyre was put among the constellations for the following reason, as Eratosthenes says. Made at first by Mercury from a tortoise shell, it was given to Orpheus, son of Calliope and Oeagrus, who was passionately devoted to music . . . [after his death] the Muses gathered the scattered limbs and gave them burial, and as the greatest favor they could confer, they put as a memorial his lyre, pictured with stars, among the constellations. Apollo and Jove consented, for Orpheus had praised Apollo highly, and Jupiter granted this favor to his daughter . . . (Poet. Astr., p. 191)

Lucian also speaks of the catasterism of Orpheus, but offers a different reason for it. He says that because Orpheus sang of theological matters as well as of the music of the spheres, the seven planets agreeing with the seven strings of his lyre, "to honor these things, the Greeks set apart a station in the heavens and numerous stars are denominated Orpheus his harp" (Ind., 6).

However Orpheus came to be in the heavens, he seems to have held his position there for many centuries. As long as the men of antiquity, of the Middle Ages, and of the Renaissance looked at the stars and found there the instrument of reason, the lyre, they were tempted to discuss Orpheus in cosmological terms. Gower's Orpheus, who brought Boethian amor and concord to the

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warring elements, was not far in intellectual history from the peacemaking Orpheus of the classical writers; nor would it be lost on a man accustomed to look at the stars, and to think in terms of concordia discors, that the lyre of Orpheus the man of reason and contemplation must, in the nature of things, be placed near the constellation of Hercules.

PLATE I



Fig. 1. Metope from Delphi,  
5th century B.C.



Fig. 2. Roman copy of an Hellenic  
relief of the 5th century  
B.C. Naples Museum.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### ORPHEUS IN CHRISTIAN ANTIQUITY

The Oracles are dumb,  
No voice or hideous hum  
Runs through the arched roof in words deceiving.  
Apollo from his shrine  
Can no more divine,  
With hollow shriek the steep of Delphos leaving.

These lines from Milton's "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" are fine poetry but poor history. Pagan culture did not come to a halt at the birth of Christ, nor even with the Edict of Milan in 312. Indeed, the vitality of the Orpheus myth is nowhere more evident than in the Apostolic and early Patristic periods. During the first few centuries after the death of Christ, Christian writers, while generally hostile towards pagan mythology because of its promotion of polytheism and idolatry, came to regard the myth of Orpheus with increasing favor. The Fathers found that the similarities between the life and deeds of Orpheus and those of Christ were useful in presenting to the Gentiles Christ's ministry and teaching, particularly



since almost any Greek would know the legend of Orpheus. The divine parentage of both Orpheus and Christ, their miracle-working abilities, their civilizing missions, violent deaths; and most important, the distinction they both shared in having been able to return to the world of the living from the underworld, made for a striking and effective analogy by which the significance of Christ's life could be impressed upon a potential convert. Eventually, the legend of Orpheus even acquired, in the writings of the Fathers, a Christian significance of its own.

Yet the transition from the Orpheus of pagan antiquity treated in the Introduction to this study, to the new Orpheus of Christian antiquity, was not without dust and heat. In some of the earliest apologies, Orpheus was regarded as merely another pagan demi-god to be discredited. The suggestion that his myth, or any pagan myth, could have value for Christians, is lacking from certain of the very earliest extant apologies, such as that of Tatian. But as the church grew more secure in the Empire, Christian writers singled Orpheus out more and more frequently as a mythological figure of peculiar interest to Christians.





Thus, parts of the Orpheus legend were emphasized and de-emphasized in order to shape it to fit the service of the newly emerging spiritual and social power.

In addition to comparison with the life of Christ, there were two other ways in which the legend was employed by the Christian controversialists. First, they saw Orpheus as a pagan spokesman for monotheism. Second, the Fathers often spoke of him as the earliest Greek theologian when they wished to show that Moses and his writings were earlier. It is in these three areas that Orpheus' encounters with Christianity are most notable.

### Orpheus and the Trope of Antiquity

One of the pagan charges against the Christians most difficult to counter, was that they were new-fangled and had neither traditions nor history. In reply to this charge, the Christian apologists traced Christianity's origins back to Judaism and then tried to show that the Old Testament and its prophets were far older than the sacred books of the Greeks, such as the Homeric poems, the Theogony of Hesiod and the



poems of Orpheus. Since this technique becomes in the hands of the apologists a rhetorical device, I have, for convenience, called it the trope of antiquity.

Attempts to show that the Pentateuch and the prophets were older than and superior to the writings of the Greeks were not peculiar to the Christian apologists. Such attempts, we may recall, had already been made by Alexandrian Jewish writers. The reasons why these writers wished to show the antiquity and superiority of the law are not completely agreed upon and there are two general positions on this point at present. The first, and most prevalent, is that held by L. Cerfaux and H. A. Wolfson.<sup>1</sup> Briefly, this view holds that as the Jews dispersed and became more involved in Hellenistic life, the common ideology of Judaism became of greater importance to them. With their common background and homeland no longer so evident, they became increasingly concerned with its existence and superiority to their present surroundings.

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<sup>1</sup>L. Cerfaux, "Influence des Mystères sur le Judaïsme avant Philon," Muséon 37 (1924) and H. A. Wolfson, Philo (Cambridge, Mass., 1948), I, 4ff. A good discussion of Jewish propaganda can be found in A. Nock, Conversion (Oxford, 1933), pp. 78-81.



According to this view, the apologetic literature of this period was chiefly proselytising in nature, trying to persuade Greeks by works written in that language, that Jehovah was the one true God and that Israel would ultimately be triumphant.<sup>2</sup> The second position on these writings is presented by Moses Hadas.<sup>3</sup> He argues that the Jews were not writing for the Greeks, but rather for each other in the hope of "strengthening the self-esteem of the Jews themselves and perhaps heightening their esteem in the eyes of the dominant environment." Because many Alexandrian Jews did not know Hebrew, these works were written in Greek.

The Christian apologists, in taking over the trope of antiquity from the Jews, were, of course, putting this trope to very different uses. No one had accused the Jews of being new-fangled, or of having a religion without tradition, whereas almost all

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<sup>2</sup>The Alexandrian Jews also tried to trace Greek science back to Enoch, Moses, and Abraham. Moses "was the teacher of Orpheus; and when grown up he taught mankind many useful things. For he was the inventor of ships, and machines for laying stones, and Egyptian arms, and engines for drawing water and for war, and invented philosophy. Further he divided the State into thirty-six Nomes . . ." Artapanus in Eusebius, Praep. Evang., IX, 27, tr. Gifford.

<sup>3</sup>Aristeas to Philocrates (New York, 1951), p.60.

of the apologists felt compelled to answer such charges. The earliest extant apologists to use the trope of antiquity with reference to Orpheus were Tatian and Theophilus in the 2d century. These two early apologists exemplify quite distinct attitudes toward history, towards apologetic techniques and towards Orpheus. Tatian looks backward to the apologetic techniques of the Alexandrian Jews and his attitude towards Orpheus is one of mild hostility. For Theophilus on the other hand, a history based on accurate bible chronology is of prime importance as a device to counter pagan charges. Pagan history such as that of Tacitus, provided the new Christian convert with no information about his religion. And Theophilus was perhaps the first of the Fathers to supply this lack.

It soon became imperative for the Christians to produce a chronology which would . . . summarize the history which the converts were now supposed to consider their own . . . show the antiquity of the Jewish-Christian doctrine . . . [and] present a model of providential history. The result was that, unlike pagan chronology, Christian chronology was also a philosophy of history.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano, "Pagan and Christian Historiography in the Fourth Century A.D." in A. Momigliano ed. The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century (Oxford, 1963), p. 83.

Tatian (b. 120 A.D.). Tatian makes use of the older geneological chronology to show that Moses is more ancient, and hence has greater authority than the Greek writers.

. . . it is evident that Moses was older than the ancient heroes, wars and demons. And we ought rather to believe him who stands before them in point of age, than the Greeks, who, without being aware of it, drew his doctrines [as] from a fountain . . . . Moses is not only older than Homer, but than all the writers that were before him--older than Linus, Philammon, Thamyris, Amphion, Musaeus, Orpheus . . . . (Ad Gr., XL, XLI, ANF, p. 81).

This statement implies that the philosophers and poets drew their information from the Pentateuch, and hence that whatever they may say is at second hand. In this, Tatian's approach is similar to that of Artapanus mentioned above. Tatian is more concerned to explode the pagan arguments by means of the trope of antiquity than to reply to them with a new Christian chronology. To him, Orpheus was a barbarian who taught the Greeks the mysteries and a poet whose reputation was false, since all of his works, as we saw in the Introduction, were written by Onomacritus (Ad Gr., I, XLI, ANF, pp. 65, 81). Certainly Tatian makes no attempt to put Orpheus to Christian uses.



Theophilus (b. 140 A.D.). Theophilus uses the trope of antiquity rather differently from Tatian. In him we can see combined a need to formulate Christian history and a desire to conserve the best of Greek learning. Theophilus tries to develop a Christian theory of history based on actual events rather than the genealogies of pagan myth. He takes pains to refute, by means of bible chronology, specific claims of the pagans.

Jubal is he who made known the psaltery and the harp . . . others say that Orpheus discovered the art of music from the sweet voices of the birds. Their story is shown to be empty and vain, for these inventors [i.e. Orpheus] lived many years after the flood. (Ad Autol., II, 30, ANF, p. 106)

Theophilus as a practical apologist did not wish to discard pagan mythology and history entirely. As a Greek convert deeply conversant with the literature of his culture, he may well have wished to avoid antagonizing his Greek readers. His apologetic method, is, on the whole, an urbane one. For instance, he makes a distinction between pagan and Christian revelation, but still admits that God was present to the theologians of the pagans.

Did not the poets Homer and Hesiod and Orpheus profess that they themselves had been instructed by Divine Providence? . . . How much more, then, shall we know the truth who are instructed by the holy prophets, who were possessed by the Holy Spirit of God! (Ad Autol., III, 17, ANF, p. 116).

Clement (b. 150 A.D.). Clement of Alexandria went even further than Theophilus in admitting the possibility that the pagans may have had some understanding of the Truth, and again, as in the case of Theophilus, it may have been because he had a broad knowledge of Hellenic and Hellenistic literature. He wrote three works, the Protrepticus or Exhortation to the Greeks, the Paedagogus or Instructor and the Stromata or Miscellanies. In the Protrepticus and Stromata he discusses Orpheus at some length. Clement is important to us here in that he supplies information about Orpheus in each of the three areas discussed in this chapter. His use of the trope of antiquity, however, occurs mainly in the Stromata, a work in eight books which, as its name suggests, deals with a great variety of subjects, including the relation between Greek philosophy and theology and the wisdom of the Hebrew Pentateuch.

Clement was extremely interested in Greek philosophy and its application to Christianity. He was much concerned with the way in which the Greeks came to have access to the true theology, and the trope of antiquity was helpful to him in his explanation. He asserts, for example, that the wisdom of the Greeks was in reality, of barbarian origin, and that most of it derived from the Egyptians who in turn got it from the Jews.

And that most of [the oldest Greek philosophers] were barbarians by extraction, and were trained among barbarians, what need is there to say? Pythagoras is shown to have been either a Tuscan or a Tyrian . . . and Orpheus was an Odrysian or a Thracian. The most, too, show Homer to have been an Egyptian . . . . And Plato does not deny that he procured all that is most excellent in philosophy from the barbarians; and he admits that he came into Egypt. (Strom. I, xv, ANF, p. 395)

In another part of the Stromata, Clement discusses the way in which God is intelligible but not sensible. He finds this idea not merely in the Old Testament, but in the writings of Plato and Orpheus as well, who, he conjectures, learned it from Moses.

"For both is it a difficult task to discover the Father and Maker of this universe; and having found Him, it is impossible to declare Him to all . . .," says the truth-

loving Plato. For he had heard right well that the all-wise Moses, ascending the mount for holy contemplation, to the summit of intellectual objects, necessarily commands that the whole people do not accompany him . . . . And again Orpheus, the theologian, aided from this quarter, . . . adds: "Him no one of mortals has seen, but He sees all." (V, xii, ANF, p. 267)

If Plato and Orpheus understood the single and incorporeal nature of God, and had the authority of learning it from the Pentateuch, then their works are not without value for the Christians. Moreover, one feels that Clement, in the Stromata, wishes to justify his own fondness for the thought of Plato by enlisting him in the "philosophical family" who lived before or in ignorance of Christ, as Dante calls them. "There I saw Socrates and Plato,/ who stood before all others . . . and I saw Orpheus,/ Tullius and Linus . . . ." (Inf., IV, 132ff). Clement apparently agrees with the early neo-Platonist, Numenius, whom he quotes as having asked, "What is Plato, but Moses speaking in Attic Greek?" (Strom. I, xxii, ANF, p. 449).

Orpheus, of course, is much less acceptable than Plato as a precursor of Christian theology, but even he is shown as being in the direct line of Moses, one of those "taught in theology by those prophets . . .

I mean Orpheus, Linus, Musaeus, Homer, and Hesiod, and those in this fashion wise." (Strom. V, iv, ANF, p. 234)

Thus, since pagan philosophy had the sanction of a Mosaic origin, and since it offered the only available systematic approach to knowledge, such learning, Clement felt, was indispensable to the Christians of his time. Such, at least, is the justification Clement offers for his use of the pagan philosophy, in the first book of the Stromata.

If the Hellenic philosophy comprehends not the whole extent of the truth . . . yet it prepares the way for the truly royal teaching; training in some way or other, and moulding the character, and fitting him who believes in Providence for the reception of the truth. (I, xvi, ANF, p. 405)

Orpheus, then, when he speaks of the incorporeality of God, is speaking as one divinely inspired, who should be listened to by the Christian as one pagan who confirms the doctrine of the Church.

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With the edict of Milan in 312, relations between the Christians and the pagans changed radically. To some degree the Christians were less defensive about their own position in the Empire, since, as far as they were concerned, Constantine had espoused their cause.



This growing self-assurance in the early Church was reflected in the somewhat changed character of the apologetic writings of the 4th century, and for our purposes, in the apologists' attitude toward Orpheus. The apologists generally, with the exception, perhaps, of Lactantius, were somewhat readier to see a limited value in pagan culture.

Even though Christianity was a defacto religion, apologists still employed the trope of antiquity and they still employed it with reference to Orpheus. Some of the apologists now admit that Orpheus knew that there was only one God and cannot understand why he should not have committed himself to monotheism at once.

Theodoret (b. 396 A.D.). Theodore, like Clement and others, was a comparatist in religious matters, much interested in the religious customs of the Empire though never for a moment suggesting a syncretism in which Christianity was on a par with, for instance, Mithraism. Theodore was indebted to Clement in several ways, not the least being that he took over a Clementine metaphor in the title of his apology, A Cure for the Ills of the Greeks. In his Exhortation

to the Greeks, Clement had referred to Christ and the New Law as the "wounded surgeon" who would heal the "distempered parts" of the Gentiles, and Theodoret develops this idea in his own apology. Theodoret displays his apologist's credentials by showing the great antiquity of Jewish thought to the Greeks. He does this by the traditional dating of Moses and of the life and times of Orpheus. He exhorts the Greeks to reject a false mythology and accept a true theology.

Why then do we draw water from this troubled and muddy trickle [of Greek myth] in place of the limpid fountain where the Platonic theology has sprung and in which he [Plato] mixed slime and mud. Do you not know that Moses the law giver of the Jews is far older than all your poets, historians and philosophers? (Gr. Cur Aff. II, PG, 83, 840)

Supporting his views with the conjectures of Jewish historians whom he presumes to have authoritative knowledge, he points out that Moses lived thousands of years before the Trojan War, while "Homer and Hesiod lived long after this war, Orpheus, the first of the poets, lived only a generation before it, since with Jason and his company he took part in the voyage of the Argo" (II, PG, 83, 841).



Theodoret is one of the few apologists who refers to the supposedly historical deeds of Orpheus, and to him Orpheus seems to have been a historical person whose life was of considerable interest. Theodoret offers more information about Orpheus the man, poet and theologian than do most of his predecessors, drawing his information from pagan and Jewish sources, such as Plutarch, Diodorus, Demosthenes, Plato and Artapanus, Eupolemus and Aristobulus the Peripatetic. He followed Diodorus in assuming that Orpheus was an early syncretist who, learning in Egypt the mysteries of Isis and Osiris, changed them into those of Demeter and Dionysus when he came to Athens (I, PG 83, 796).

According to Theodoret, in addition to learning the mysteries in Egypt, Orpheus learned monotheism there as well. In this he was an admirable figure though he is to be castigated for refusing to accept the truth when once he knew it. Not only was Orpheus guilty of refusing the light himself, but, more heinous still, he deceived his followers.

Though Orpheus had learned the true theology from the Egyptians who in turn had gotten some idea of this from the Jews, he mixes in his theology some elements of error and transmits the infamous orgies of Dionysus.

After having, so to speak, coated with honey the rim of the cup, he lets those who would drink there, drink wormwood.  
(II, PG 83, 836)

Augustine (b. 354 A.D.). By the end of the 4th century, the apologetic period had drawn to a close and Augustine's City of God marked the last major effort in this genre. The reason was, of course, that there was no longer anything for which the Christian must apologize. In the City of God and elsewhere, Augustine makes a few references to Orpheus, some of which are traditional and some of which are original. He had sufficient distance from the Hellenistic and Graeco-Roman practice of mingling old deities and creating new ones, to regard this practice with historical interest and Christian scorn. Augustine used the trope of antiquity with reference to Orpheus, but his interest in him really lay, not in showing that Moses was older than Orpheus, but rather in showing Orpheus the hero, how he came to be regarded as divine, and in what way the monotheism attributed to him was to be regarded by the Christian.

While there was little evidence with which to assume that Orpheus was ever worshipped as a god,

descriptions of the deifications of heroes were quite common in Hellenistic literature. Pausanias, very attentive to the customs of his own and the preceding age, describes such a process. A certain young man was supposed to be the son of Heracles and was accordingly named Theagenes. After many feats of remarkable strength in childhood, the young man became a famous athlete and won the garland fourteen-hundred times. His people set up a statue to him when he died and later threw it into the sea when the statue killed a man who had insulted it, falling on him and crushing him to death. After they had disposed of the statue, a great plague came upon the people and finally recovering the statue from the sea and worshipping it as a god, the people set up many shrines to Theagenes throughout Greece. (VI, ii, 1-9)

The apologists are very fond of pointing out such deifications as this to the pagans in an effort to show them that the gods they worshipped were or had been mere men. It much disturbed the Fathers, on the other hand, that the pagans treated their gods as human beings or at least as very superior beings whose peccadillos and appetites were human but on a grand

scale. Origen, for example, chastised Celsus because he had "omitted to take notice of the myth, embellished chiefly by Orpheus, in which the gods are described as affected by human weaknesses and passions" (Contra Celsum, I, 16-18, ANF, pp. 402-3).

Augustine alludes to such a process of mistaken deification in relation to Orpheus. Apparently there were those who confused the notion that Orpheus had impressed the gods of the underworld by his music with the idea that Orpheus was in some way a god of the underworld.

Even such poets as Orpheus, Musaeus and Linus were unable to abstain from dishonouring their gods by fables. But yet these theologues, worshipped the gods, and were not worshipped as gods, although the city of the ungodly is wont, I know not how, to set Orpheus over the sacred, or rather sacrilegious rites of hell. (Civ. Dei, XVIII, 14, tr. M. Dods)

A notable feature of Augustine's treatment of Orpheus, which may indicate the apologetic temper of the age, is his inability to understand how Orpheus, once he knew the truth, could fail to act upon it. For this reason he expressed mistrust of Orpheus to his Christian followers.

If any truth about God or the Son of God is taught or predicted in the Sibyls, or in Orpheus . . . it may be useful for the refutation of Pagan error, but cannot lead us to believe in these writers. For while they spoke, because they could not help it, of the God whom we worship, they either taught their fellow-countrymen to worship idols or demons, or allowed them to do so without daring to protest against it.

(Contra Faustum XIII, 15, PNF, p. 205)

Augustine suggests that though heathen writers may have been divinely inspired with an understanding of the Logos, inspiration is not an act of will, and as in the Ion, such writers are only instruments for the revelation of the truth and do not themselves contribute to it. It is not then sufficient, to Augustine's way of thinking, that a writer should have been aware, like Orpheus, of the truth of monotheism or Christianity, if he did not commit himself in principle and action to it. Augustine's emphasis, on volitionalism then, seems to lead him to a somewhat different position with regard to Orpheus than that of the other apologists.

Even though Augustine differed from some of the other apologists we have considered in certain particulars of his treatment of Orpheus, he still made use of the trope of antiquity in traditional

fashion. Though Orpheus was old, Moses was, of course, older.

Only those theological poets, Orpheus, Linus and Musaeus, and it may be, some others among the Greeks, are found earlier in date than the Hebrew prophets whose writings we hold as authoritative. But not even those preceded in time our true divine, Moses, who authentically preached the one true God . . . (Civ. Dei, XVIII, 37, tr. M. Dods).

Miscellaneous authors. There are, of course, other brief references to Orpheus in the works of the Christian apologists, most of which are variations on the themes outlined above. These brief mentions, however, include most of the more hostile references to Orpheus. Whereas the detailed treatments of him tend to be qualifications, the short ones tend to be blanket condemnations. Two examples from the Fathers, one early and one late, will suffice to illustrate their character. For Athenagoras (b. 140 A.D.), Orpheus is merely the representative of a depraved and brutal mystery religion which honored gods without divinity, dignity, or truth.

If they [the Gentiles] really thought promiscuous and unrestrained sexual intercourse wrong, they ought to hate . . . Orpheus their poet who told of Zeus' wickedness and of his

impieties worse than those of Thyestes  
 . . ." (Embassy for the Christians, 32,  
 tr. J. Crehan)

Gregory of Nazianzen (b. 330 A.D.) holds much the same opinion of Orpheus in his Oration on Holy Lights. Giving a list of various pagan evils, he said that among the Christians there were no "Thracian orgies from which the word Worship . . . is said to be derived; nor rites and mysteries of Orpheus" (PNF, p. 353).

#### Orpheus as a Spokesman for Monotheism

Had Virgil read, two hundred years after his death, the works of Clement of Alexandria or Justin Martyr, he would have been puzzled to find that a new deed had been attributed to Orpheus, and that this deed seemed more important to the Christian writers than the underworld adventures which had interested Virgil in the Aeneid. When Orpheus was an old man, Virgil would have read, he recanted his earlier polytheism, rejected the pagan gods and expressed his belief in one god.

The idea that Orpheus had travelled in Egypt and there been instructed by Moses had been put forward by Artapanus as early as 150 B.C. But at that

time the idea was not developed further, and was used mainly to embellish Jewish history. It is only in the time of the Christian apologists, that the fruit of Orpheus' Egyptian education becomes a prominent feature of his story. Criticizing the apostate Emperor Julian, Cyril of Alexandria (b. 380 A.D.) is able by the end of the 4th century A.D. to refer confidently to Orpheus' death bed contrition as an established part of the Orpheus legend.

They say of Orpheus the son of Oeagrus, that he was the most superstitious of men, that he lived before Homer and that he composed songs and hymns to the fictitious gods, getting much glory from this. Further, they say that then he rejected his own teachings, understanding that he had left the path and wandered from the right road, and choosing the better cause, he spoke truth about God instead of his earlier lies. (Contra Jul. I, PG 76, 541)

Where would Cyril have learned this new version of the Orpheus legend? There was a poem in the Hellenistic period, thought to have been written by Orpheus to his son Musaeus, and called his Palinode or Testament (Παλινόδιον). The early Christian apologists, encountering this poem, thought that it was of very great antiquity; that it was actually written by Orpheus during his life time and that it was a voluntary



statement made by him when the pagan deities were at the height of their powers. This Palinode was apparently quite popular in the early Patristic period, since several Fathers seem to have memorized enough of it to quote the first few lines frequently, and other references to the poem are equally common. Theophilus asks of what use was it that Orpheus named "the three hundred and sixty-five gods, whom in the end of his life he rejects, maintaining in his precepts that there is one God?" (Ad Autol., III, 2, ANF, p. 111). Lactantius (b. 250 A.D.) goes even further in his description of Orpheus' change of heart.

The poets, therefore, however much they adorned the gods in their poems, and amplified their exploits with the highest praises, yet very frequently confess that all things are held together and governed by one spirit or mind. Orpheus, who is the most ancient of the poets, and coeval with the gods themselves, --since it is reported that he sailed among the Argonauts together with the sons of Tyndarus and Hercules, --speaks of the true and great God as the first born, because nothing was produced before Him, but all things sprung from Him . . . . Thus, under the guidance of nature and reason, he understood that there was a power of surpassing greatness which framed heaven and earth. (Divine Institutes I, 5, ANF, pp. 13-14)

Though many Christian writers allude to the *Palinode*, only Justin and Eusebius quote extensively from it. Except for the texts in these two writers and a fragment in a theosophical codex at Tübingen (ed. Buresch, 1889) there is, to my knowledge, no extant manuscript of the *Palinode*. The version of this poem given below is found in the *Praeparatio Evangelica* of Eusebius (b. 265 A.D.), who says he read it in Aristobulus.

I speak to those fit to hear. All you unhallowed, you who flee the ordinances of the laws (for God's law has been established for all), close the gates. Listen to me, Musaeus, son of the lightbearing Moon, for I speak the truth. Do not chance the loss of a dear eternity because of former opinions. Look to the divine word. Pay constant heed to it, directing there, the inmost intelligence of the heart. Enter readily on the path, perceiving the single and eternal pattern of the universe. For an ancient tradition speaks of this being. He is one, self-begotten and all things are brought to pass by him. He is immanent, yet transcendent. No man can see him though he can be known by the intelligence. And he, out of his goodness, does not ordain evil for mortal men. Strife, Hatred, War, Plague and tearful Grief attend them. Nor is there any other [God]. And he sees all with ease. You have not seen the track and sturdy hand of the great God upon the earth, but I have seen them and I will show you. I do not, however, see the God himself. For he is above the clouds and ten-veiled to me and to all men for eternity. No speaking mortal

can see this ruler unless it be the only-begotten branch from the Chaldean tree, for he [Abraham] knew the course of the planets and how the spheres rotate around the earth upon their axis. And this being controls the winds in the air and the waters of the stream. And he makes the flame of his self-engendered fire shine out. Moreover he dwells in the great heaven on a golden throne, and his feet stride the earth and he stretches his right hand to the boundaries of Ocean. The base of the mountains trembles at his wrath; nor is it possible to withstand his mighty purpose. He is everywhere and he brings to pass all things on earth and in heaven and he commands the beginning, the middle and the end: such is the word of the ancients, such is the word of the one born of water [Moses], the opinions of God having been given to him in the double-folded Law. Nor is it lawful to speak otherwise. I tremble in my heart and body [at the thought of this God]. From the heights he brings all to pass and makes all harmonious. O child, fix your thoughts on these matters, keep a rein on your tongue and keep my words in your heart. (XIII, 12, PG 21,1097-1100).

The other text of this poem, quoted in Justin, De Mon. 2 and Coh. ad Gent. 15, though very much shorter, differs in few particulars except that in Justin's version, God is seen as the source of evil: "and this being gives men evil out of his goodness, both chilling War and tearful Grief."

Since the Palinode attacks polytheism and proposes the omnipotence and invisibility of one god, it

must be either a Christian or a Jewish work. Though the Fathers may have made a few emendations and interpolations in the course of transmitting the poem, I think the work is predominantly Jewish in origin. It is unlikely that Clement, Justin, and Eusebius would have forged such a poem because in their time there was no longer a need for Patriarchal testimony to support monotheism. The New Law had superseded the Prophets. Origen shows the Christians how they no longer need the Old Testament prophecies.

Precious, then, is a lamp to men in darkness, and there is need of a lamp until the sun rises; and precious also is the glory in the face of Moses, and of the prophets also, I think, and a beautiful sight, by which we are introduced so as to be able to see the glory of Christ.  
(Commentary on St. Matthew X, 9, ANF,  
 p. 418)

This is not to say that the apologists did not make use of Mosaic prophecies in attacking polytheism. But both internal and external evidence in the Palinode suggests that it is of Jewish rather than of Christian origin.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>See Cerfaux, p. 39.

For instance, the syncretic features of the Palinode are of the kind popular in the Hellenistic period. In the poem, the one God is described in ways which suggest that the author had Zeus as well as Jehovah in mind.<sup>6</sup> Where the Palinode says "all things are brought to pass" (ΤΕΛΕΙΤΑΙ) by God, one is reminded of the common epithet for Zeus, Perfecter (ΤΕΛΕΙΩΤΗΣ) by which title Clytemnestra, for example, addresses him in the Agamemnon (l. 973: ΖΕῦ ΤΕΛΕΙΕ). The God of the Palinode "controls the winds of the air and the waters of the stream." Zeus was often called βροντῶν Thunderer, and οὐριός, God of Good Winds, and he shook mountains in his wrath.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Wolfson says that "in Hellenistic times the term Zeus ceased to be the proper name for a god and came to mean 'chief god'," 15n.

<sup>7</sup>The fact that God is present everywhere in the universe and represents the element of fire, "and he makes the flame of his self-engendered fire shine out," suggests Stoic influence on the thought of the poem, of the sort that is present in the Hellenistic Book of Wisdom. In Cleanthes' "Hymn to Zeus," there are references to the god as Perfecter and controller of the elements. "The whole order of the heavens obeyeth Thy word: as it moveth around the earth . . . Nor is anything done apart from Thee: nor in the firmament, nor in the seas," tr. W. Pater. For the full text of this hymn as well as a collection of Stoic cosmological fragments relevant to the Palinode, see Edwyn Bevan, Later Greek Religion (Boston, Mass., 1950). The Palinode is also linked with Greek prayers likely to have

The Palinode of Orpheus incorporates two syncretic traditions of Hellenistic thought which had perhaps as much bearing on the changing figure of Orpheus as did the Palinode itself directly. These traditions are, first, the initiatory or "mystery" lore, in which one man unfolds a divine wisdom and ritual to others, and second, the prophetic, as demonstrated particularly by the long line of Sibylline and pseudo-Sibylline literature. The essentially Hellenistic nature of the new Orpheus who emerges from the works of the Christian Father can be demonstrated by examining the Palinode in terms of these traditions which it brings together.

Jewish Mysteries. The opening of the Palinode reminds one of the Prorrhesis or Proclamation of a Greek mystery with the young Musaeus serving as the *μύστυς*, and with Orpheus the theologian and seer

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been of interest to Hellenized Jews. See for example a magical papyrus from Egypt in Karl Preisendanz, ed. Papyri Graecae Magicae, (Leipzig, 1931) XII, 254ff. This papyrus contains a theurgic invocation to Zeus as a commander of winds and one who makes the hills and plains tremble as well as controls the waters of streams and rivers. Also of interest are Il. X, 5-6; XII, 278; XVI, 297; XVII, 645; and Od. V, 303-5, as well as Ps. 18: 13-14.

giving to him religious information which is forbidden to unpurified men. But the Palinode does not portray an Orphic mystery, rather it presents Hebrew wisdom in the language of an initiation. Musaeus learns, not the nature of Dionysus, but the nature of Jehovah and his divine government. This government encompasses all men, even those who deny its existence or who are unaware of it. But Musaeus is warned that he must keep his new-found knowledge to himself--perhaps because the time is not ripe for this mystery to be widely known.

If the idea of a Jewish "mystery" seems a contradiction in terms, we should recall that the Alexandrian Jews, aware that they were the only monotheists, regarded their Law as their exclusive property or mystery. In the Hellenistic period, the term

*μυστήριον* was no longer a purely pagan term for the hermetic rituals of certain cults. Wolfson notes that the term mystery "had acquired in Greek philosophy an additional meaning. It referred to that kind of wisdom which some philosophers believed . . . to belong to the gods, and which had been imparted in secret only to a chosen few" (I, 24). In the Palinode Orpheus

is seen in his traditional Hellenic role as unveiler of mystic rites and secret wisdom to a circle of initiates, but the kind of wisdom he reveals is Hebraic and illustrates the type of syncretism associated with the Jews of Alexandria.

If the Palinode were written by an Alexandrian Jew who wished either to convert the pagans or to raise the morale of his own countrymen, it would be very likely to introduce the god of Abraham and Isaac by reference to his nearest counterpart in pagan theology and this it does. It refers to God interchangeably as *Θεός*, a common noun traditionally used for any God, and *Αἰς*, the accusative form of the proper noun traditionally used for Zeus.

The Hellenistic Jews tried to show the Greeks that when they worshipped Zeus, they were really worshipping, under a different name, Jehovah, the One God of Israel. The Jew Aristeas, in an apologetic work in which he masquerades as a Greek, called Aristeas to Philocrates, tells how he tried to persuade Ptolemy Philadelphus to release his Jewish slaves.

Release those who are afflicted in wretchedness, for the same God [*αὐτὸς Θεός*] who has given them their law guides your kingdom also, as I have learned in my researches.



God, the overseer and creator of all things, whom they worship is He whom all men worship, and we too, Your Majesty, though we address Him differently, as Zeus and Dis [*Ζῆς καὶ Δις*]; by these names men of old not unsuitably signified that He through whom all creatures receive life and come into being is the guide and lord of all. (tr. Hadas, 18, pp. 100-103)

The Jews used not only the name but also the epithets of Zeus when wishing to describe their own god. For instance Philo, when speaking of the hardships which the Jews underwent in Egypt, says that Pharoah showed no "shame or fear of the God of liberty and hospitality to guests and suppliants" (Life of Moses, I, 36, my emphasis). The epithets Philo applied to Jehovah *ἐλευθερίος* and *φειδύλος* were the property of Zeus, the latter since the time of Homer, for Paris, in violating the law of Zeus Hospitable had brought on the Trojan War (Il. XIII, 625).

The Prophetic Tradition. Clement of Alexandria, attempting to prove that the Greeks had some knowledge of the true God, quotes St. Paul as saying "Take also the Hellenic books, read the Sibyl, how it is shown that God is one" (Strom. VI, 5, ANF, p. 328). The writings collected under the name Sibylline

Oracles<sup>8</sup> were so popular with the Fathers that they referred to them almost as often as they did to the Old Testament. This popularity is understandable when we realize that the oracles current in the first three centuries A.D. were not so much answers to specific questions, put to them by pilgrims such as Aeneas, but rather, more general statements, often of monotheism and moral philosophy, very much in accord with the precepts of the Christian Fathers.

When the Capitol burned in 83 B.C., the great Roman collection of Sibylline oracles was destroyed and the government sent collectors to Sicily, Greece, and Asia Minor, the nominal home of the Sibylline prophecies to make a new collection (Lactantius, Div. Instit. I, 6). But this new collection, ostensibly of genuine oracles only, included many forgeries, and, most notably, forgeries by Alexandrian Jews. Bard Thompson, in his article "Patristic Use of the Sibylline Oracles," describes the nature of these contributions as follows.

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<sup>8</sup> See Milton S. Terry, ed. and tr. The Sibylline Oracles (N.Y., 1890). The introduction to this work is helpful for questions of dating, source and influence.

Among the early creators of spurious Sibyllina were Alexandrian Jews who shared the general enthusiasm which arose at the beginning of the Maccabean revolt . . . [The Sibyls were used] in a serious attempt to place Jewish intellectual achievements clearly before the world . . . to give expression to the increasing influence of eschatological thoughts . . . , to convey threats of doom against persecuting powers, especially Assyria and Rome, and . . . to propagate to this wider, Sibylline audience the rudiments of the Hebrew faith, especially her monotheism and moralism.<sup>9</sup>

Several passages in the Palinode of Orpheus show the dependence of the author upon the Sibylline books, almost particularly upon their Proem, which exists almost complete in the apologetic work of Theophilus of Antioch. This Proem appears to be a fragment from an earlier collection of oracles and is, in Terry's opinion, the work of an Alexandrian Jew at the beginning of the 3rd century B.C. (The Sibylline Oracles, p. 18). It makes several statements about the nature of God:

One God there is  
 Who reigns alone, supremely great, unborn,  
 Almighty and invisible, himself  
 Alone beholding all things, but unseen  
 Is he himself by any mortal flesh.  
 For who is able with the eyes of flesh  
 To see the heavenly, true, immortal God  
 Whose dwelling is the sky? (tr. Terry, p. 25)

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<sup>9</sup> Review of Religion XVI (1952), p. 125.

When this passage is compared with the corresponding passages from the Palinode--"He is one, self-begotten, and all things are brought to pass by him. He is immanent, yet transcendent. No man can see him though he can be known by the intelligence"--similarities of both style and matter are immediately evident. In another part of the Proem, the Sibyl describes the visitation of evils upon men as follows:

. . . [God] rewards the good,  
 With an abundant bounty, but fierce wrath  
 He rouses for the wicked and unjust,  
 And war, and pestilence, and tearful woes.  
 (p. 26)

The Palinode describes the same evils in words that seem direct echoes, listing them as ". . . Strife, Hatred, War, Plague and tearful Grief." Not only the order of the catalogue, but also the use of personifications in the Proem and Palinode are similar, though it is a matter of editorial preference as to whether these uses of the singular are to be capitalized. Most interesting is the phrase "tearful Grieffs" ( $\alpha' \lambda \gamma \epsilon \alpha$   $\delta \alpha \kappa \rho \upsilon \sigma' \epsilon \nu \tau \alpha$ ) which I have not been able to find elsewhere in Greek literature but in these two poems. Since the authorship of the Palinode is unknown, it

cannot of course, definitely be established that the author read the Sibylline books. It is very likely, however, that he did. If, as I have tried to show, the author of the Palinode was an Alexandrian Jew, he would have been familiar with some Sibyllina, and most certainly with some of Alexandrian origin.

A similarity of purpose further links the Proem and the Palinode. Both works attempt to put into the mouth of a pagan who was a traditional prophet of the Olympian gods, statements which describe and subscribe to a monotheistic god. That the same effort is shared by subsequent Christian writers is borne out by the frequency with which they cite the opening fragment of the Proem. Probably its concise statement of monotheistic doctrine and the fact that it was written in easily recalled hexameters contributed further to its currency. The opening lines of the Sibylline Proem are quoted for example by Justin, Theodoret, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Lactantius, Clement, Eusebius and Cyril.

Though the Christian Fathers and the Jewish writers were equally interested in the Sibyls, they display certain differences in emphasis. The Jews

were more interested in the Sibyls themselves, asserting that one was actually Jewish and a daughter-in-law of Moses. The Fathers, on the other hand, thought of the Sibyls merely as amanuenses whose prophecies but not whose persons were to be praised. They were, like certain other great figures of the non-Christian world, to be revered only insofar as they prophesied Christianity or exhorted men to Christian ideals. The attempts of the Fathers to point to places in the Old Testament which predict the coming of Christ have parallels in their treatments of the Sibylline books--in both instances they were in a sense recasting history to support what they viewed as the inevitability of the New Law. In the same way, they conjectured that Virgil's fourth Eclogue, the Pollio heralded the birth of Christ.

The Palinode of Orpheus is received by many Christian authors in the same way as are the Sibylline books. Memorable parts of it are repeatedly invoked by such writers as Clement, Theodoret, Justin, Eusebius, and Cyril as instances of true wisdom from the mouth of a pagan. And it might be ventured that, in at least one case, the variation of one text from another points to an attempt by a Christian editor to

Christianize even further the pagan (or Jewish) wisdom he is quoting.

As was mentioned above, there is a difference between the two most complete versions of Orpheus' Palinode which we possess. While Justin quotes Orpheus as having said that God "gives men evil out of his goodness," Eusebius quotes him as saying that God

. . . out of his goodness, does not ordain evil for mortal men. Strife, Hatred, War, Plague and tearful Grief attend them. Nor is there any other [God]. And he sees all with ease.

The purpose of the Praeperatio Evangelica in which the longer version of the Palinode occurs was, as its title implies, to show that the wisest and most ancient of the pagan and Jewish authors had anticipated monotheism and the coming of Christ. It is not unlikely that Eusebius, conscious of the redemptive significance of the New Law performed certain editorial emendations in his efforts to show its precedents in the works of Plato, Orpheus, and others. The context of this passage seems more readily to fit the description of a wrathful Hebraic god--the god described in Justin's version and

in the Proem to the Sibylline books.<sup>10</sup> Since Eusebius claims that he read the Palinode in the works of Aristobulus, known to be a Jewish controversial writer, it is unlikely that his original would have described any other than the Old Testament deity. There is, moreover, a sharp break in the flow of both texts of the Palinode at this point, the next sentence having no logical connection with God's authorship of evil. It seems clear that there was some mutilation of the original text, perhaps the excision of qualifying phrases by an unknown intermediate editor.

This one instance of modification undergone by pagan prophetic literature at the hands of Christian writers could be multiplied many times, both in the literature and in the art of Christian antiquity. It serves to illustrate one current of late antique thought and to render more predictable the sea-changes

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<sup>10</sup> "This thought, that God is the author of all things, including natural evils and the effects of human passions, is required by the context, and it seems probable that Eusebius tried to alter it." E. H. Gifford ed. and tr. Praeparatio Evangelica (Oxford, 1903), IV, p. 446. There are a number of interesting passages which suggest the Palinode's dependence on the Book of Isaiah, particularly with respect to a wrathful deity. See 5:25; 6:1; 11:15; 40:21-2 and 66:1.



it wrought upon such figures of classical myth and pagan history as Orpheus.

### Orpheus Compared with Christ

Amphion of Thebes and Arion of Methymna were both minstrels, and both were renowned in story. They are celebrated in song to this day in the chorus of the Greeks; the one for having allured the fishes, and the other for having surrounded Thebes with walls by the power of music. Another, a Thracian, a cunning master of his art (he also is the subject of a Hellenic legend), tamed the wild beasts by the mere might of song; and transplanted trees--oaks--by music . . . .

How, let me ask, have you believed vain fables, and supposed animals to be charmed by music; while Truth's shining face alone, as would seem, appears to you disguised, and is looked on with incredulous eyes? And so Cithaeron, and Helicon, and the mountains of the Odrysi, and the initiatory rites of the Thracians, mysteries of deceit, are hallowed and celebrated in hymns. For me, I am pained at such calamities . . .

But the dramas and the raving poets, now quite intoxicated, let us crown with ivy; and distracted outright as they are, in Bacchic fashion, with the satyrs, and the frenzied rabble, and the rest of the demon crew, let us confine to Cithaeron and Helicon, now antiquated.

But let us bring from above out of heaven, Truth, with Wisdom in all its brightness, and the sacred prophetic choir, down to the holy amount of God; . . . . And raising their eyes, and looking above, let them abandon Helicon and Cithaeron, and take up their abode in

Sion . . . . What my Eunomos sings is not the measure of Terpander, nor that of Capito, nor the Phrygian, nor Lydian, nor Dorian, but the immortal measure of the new harmony which bears God's name--the new, the Levitical song.

"Soother of pain, calmer of wrath, producing forgetfulness of all ills."

Sweet and true is the charm of persuasion which blends with this strain.

To me, therefore, that Thracian Orpheus, that Theban, and that Methymnaean,--men, and yet unworthy of the name,--seem to have been deceivers, who, under the pretence of poetry corrupting human life, possessed by a spirit of artful sorcery for purposes of destruction, celebrating crimes in their orgies, and making human woes the materials of religions worship, were the first to entice men to idols; . . . . But not such is my song, which has come to loose, and that speedily, the bitter bondage of tyrannizing demons; and leading us back to the mild and loving yoke of piety, recalls to heaven those that had been cast prostrate to the earth. It alone has tamed men, the most intractable of animals; the frivolous among them answering to the fowls of the air, deceivers to reptiles, the irascible to lions, the voluptuous to swine, the rapacious to wolves. The silly are stocks and stones, and still more senseless than stones is a man who is steeped in ignorance . . . .

Behold the might of the new song! It has made men out of stones, men out of beasts. Those, moreover, that were as dead, not being partakers of the true life, have come to life again, simply by becoming listeners to this song. It also composed the universe into melodious order, and tuned the discord of the elements to harmonious arrangement, so



that the whole world might become harmony. It let loose the fluid ocean, and yet has prevented it from encroaching on the land. The earth, again, which had been in a state of commotion, it has established, and fixed the sea as its boundary. The violence of fire it has softened by the atmosphere, as the Dorian is blended with the Lydian strain; and the harsh cold of the air it has moderated by the embrace of fire, harmoniously arranging these the extreme tones of the universe. And this deathless strain,--the support of the whole and the harmony of all,--reaching from the centre to the circumference, and from the extremities to the central part, has harmonized this universal frame of things, not according to the Thracian music, which is like that invented by Jubal, but according to the paternal counsel of God, which fired the zeal of David. (Protr., I, ANF, pp. 17-20)

This remarkable passage, which opens Clement's Exhortation to the Greeks, contains in embryo so many subsequent developments of the Orpheus myth, not only in Christian antiquity but down through the Middle Ages and even as late as Pope's "Ode for Music on St. Cecilia's Day," that its importance cannot be overstated. It is the starting place for allegorical interpretations of the Orpheus story by Christian writers, in particular those interpretations which compare Orpheus with Christ and David. In addition it connects the idea of the harmony of the spheres and the harmony of

the elements with the story of Orpheus--not, it is true, crediting Orpheus with having brought them about --that was to come later--but juxtaposing them in such a way that later writers might see a further connection and elaborate upon it.

Clement opens his Exhortation as a good preacher might, with an exemplum, to catch the attention of his audience. He tells of certain mythological persons who were thought to have performed wonders by their music. Once he has interested his audience, and in the process shown that he is familiar with their learning, he asks how they can believe that long ago a man could make the oaks follow his lyre and not recognize an even greater wonder before them at this time. Rather than look at "Truth's shining face" the Greeks prefer the polytheism of the mysteries. He concludes the exemplum by showing the Greeks that the followers of Dionysus, who think that they are inspired in their orgies by the gods, are really in the grip of frenzy, which has nothing to do with the true deity.

So far Clement has been telling Greek legend under the aegis of the Muses; now he must tell of the Truth, and for this he invokes--with echoes of Homeric

appeals for divine guidance--Truth, Wisdom and the prophets, praying that they descend to God's holy mountain and inspire him and all men. The contrast of divine inspiration with Bacchic frenzy sets the direction of his subsequent discussion of Orpheus. He shows the superiority of the New Song and its prophets by contrasting it in a number of ways with pagan religion and its prophet, Orpheus.

Orpheus was associated with three mountains-- "Cithaeron, Helicon and the mountains of the Odrysi." He was the son of Calliope, a Muse on Mount Helicon; he sang the hymns and codified the theology of the god Dionysus on Cithaeron; and he tamed savage beasts and men in the mountains of Thracian Odrysia. Clement is concerned that the Greeks should have hallowed and celebrated these mountains and all that they stand for, while they look at "Truth's shining face . . . with incredulous eyes." His personified Truth provides a contrast to the Greeks' error on several levels. First, it is immediate and vivid as opposed to the Hellenistic myths he speaks of which are based upon events far distant in time, if not entirely fabulous. Then, "Truth's shining face" has scriptural overtones which connect it

with another mountain and another prophet. One is reminded here of the account in the Book of Exodus of Moses' receiving the Law from God on Mount Sinai. God appeared to him in a thick cloud so as to be concealed from the other Israelites, descending to Sinai "in fire" (19:18). After Moses had come down from the mountain "he wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him" (34:29), and "when . . . the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone and they were afraid to come nigh him" (34:30). Clement entreats the Greeks to abandon their sacred mountains and "raving poets," now antiquated, for the holy mountain of God where they shall hear the new song of Truth.

Orpheus was known in antiquity as an eloquent persuader. According to Clement, his song persuaded men to worship idols and to tie themselves to temporal things. But the Orphic song, in which the infant Dionysus is murdered and eaten by the Titans (Guthrie, p. 21), contrasts sharply with the New Song, which brings peace to men, frees them of the bonds of the flesh and leads them into the "mild and loving yoke" of piety. Clement seems unduly harsh here in his condemnation of Orpheus. Wishing, perhaps, to emphasize the

redemptive and peaceful sides of Christianity to the Greeks, he has portrayed Orpheus as an exponent of a violent religion whose song, like that of the Sirens, maliciously lures men to destruction.

Orpheus made inanimate objects and irrational animals act against their nature, Clement feels, by sorcery. But the New Song has quelled the irrational in man and freed him to act according to his higher nature, thereby metaphorically making men out of beasts. "It alone has tamed men, the most intractable of animals; the frivolous among them answering to the fowls of the air, deceivers to reptiles, the irascible to lions, the voluptuous to swine, the rapacious to wolves." In turning the Orpheus legend to Christian ends Clement shares the method, if not the aims, of earlier allegorizers of the legend. Horace, Quintillian and others could not believe that Orpheus had really made stones respond to music or that he had really tamed savage beasts. Instead, they interpreted the legend to mean that Orpheus was a civilizing force and peacemaker among the savage tribes of Odrysia. Whereas these writers abstracted the good qualities of Orpheus from the legend, Clement has abstracted the reprehensible ones and attributed the



powers of concord to the new song. He is attracted, however, like Horace and Quintillian, not by the literal import of this "vain fable" but by its usefulness as a rhetorical device. In this he differs from the other church Fathers. Tertullian, Arnobius, Lactantius, and Firmicus Maternus were all hostile to the techniques of pagan allegory. Pagan myth was, for them, both literally and figuratively false, and no allegorical exposition could make it otherwise. Clement, while rejecting the historical truth of the Orpheus legend, does find it figuratively rewarding. Indeed, he has a high opinion of the allegorical method. He speaks in the fifth book of the Stromata of various Greek authors who employed it, and concludes that "very useful, then, is the mode of symbolic interpretation for many purposes; and it is helpful to the right theology, and to piety, and to the display of the intelligence, and the practice of brevity, and the exhibition of wisdom"<sup>11</sup> (V, 8, ANF, pp. 247-248).

As Clement leaves the discussion of Orpheus to go on to other matters he adds, almost in passing,

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<sup>11</sup>Jean Pépin, Mythe et Allégorie (Paris, 1958), p. 266.

one of the most significant features the Orpheus material has yet acquired, the similarity--or in this case dissimilarity--of Orpheus to the prophet David, and the less frequently seen association with Jubal. The New Song has harmonized the universe "not according to the Thracian music, which is like that invented by Jubal, but according to the paternal counsel of God, which fired the zeal of David." David needs no introduction. Jubal,<sup>12</sup> a less well known figure at this time, appears in the book of Genesis (4:21 ff.), where we learn that Tubal Cain, the father of those who work in iron, had a half-brother Jubal who invented the harp and organ. In the Middle Ages these half-brothers were to become the subject matter for miniatures which pictured Tubal working iron on his anvil as Jubal stands by. Jubal was supposed to have conceived the idea of the drums and the stringed instruments from the rhythmic tapping of his half-brother's hammer and the spaced tones of the vibrating iron, while Tubal's bellows gave rise to the organ. The music of Orpheus and the music

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<sup>12</sup>See Paul E. Beichner, C.S.C. The Medieval Representations of Music: Jubal or Tubal Cain (Notre Dame, Ind., 1954).

Jubal were both man-made and without divine inspiration, whereas David was traditionally seen as a reed through whom the divine music was sounded.

That Clement seems more interested in comparing these figures with the attributes of Christ than with Christ himself is in keeping with the traditions of the apologist's time. One of the charges against the Christians was that they worshipped a man, not a god, a man who was of humble origins, was ill-educated, and had died in a fashion reserved for criminals. It may have been because of such charges that the Christians tended in the 2nd and 3rd centuries to represent Christ by symbols--the Good Shepherd, the anchor, the peacock, fish, or grapes. Actual portraits are few in early Christian art, and the early Christian Fathers tend to discuss the divine side of Christ's nature in preference to the human.

Clement, in placing Orpheus together with Christ and David, with whatever qualifications, gave very considerable dignity to the Orpheus story. Indeed, it can be said that all subsequent literary treatments of this story in Christian antiquity build upon the foundations Clement provided.

One such writer influenced by Clement's treatment of Orpheus was the apologist and Church historian Eusebius. In the Praeperatio Evangelica Eusebius had compiled his tale of Orpheus from other men's words, but in the Praise of Constantine he speaks in his own voice:

The Grecian myth tells us that Orpheus had power to charm ferocious beasts, and tame their savage spirits, by striking the chords of his instrument with a master-hand: and this story is celebrated by the Greeks, and generally believed, that an unconscious instrument could subdue the untamed brute, and draw the trees from their places, in obedience to its melodious power. But he who is the author of perfect harmony, the all-wise Word of God, desiring to apply every remedy to the manifold diseases of the souls of men, employed that human nature which is the workmanship of his own wisdom, as an instrument by the melodious strains of which he soothed not indeed the brute creation, but savages endued with reason; healing each furious temper, each fierce and angry passion of the soul, both in civilized and barbarous nations by the remedial power of his Divine doctrine (15, PNF, p. 603).

Eusebius' handling of the legend seems a direct echo of Clement, with the same disapproval (Here implied rather than explicit) of the Greeks' credulity and the same inability to believe in the historicity of Orpheus' powers. Eusebius, however, does not excoriate Orpheus but merely tries to demonstrate a vast difference in

extent between his supposed powers and the actual powers of the Word of God. He also is following Clement in his description of Christ's human nature as an instrument of Divine music, for, in the Exhortation to the Greeks, Clement had written:

And He who is of David, and yet before him, the Word of God, despising the lyre and harp, which are but lifeless instruments, and having tuned by the Holy Spirit the universe, and especially man,--who, composed of body and soul, is a universe in miniature,--makes melody to God on this instrument of many tones; and to this instrument--I mean man--he sings accordant: "For thou art my harp, and pipe, and temple,"--a harp for harmony--a pipe by reason of the spirit--a temple by reason of the word; so that the first may sound, the second breathe, the third contain the Lord.  
(Protr. I, ANF, pp. 20-21)

Even in his music Orpheus appealed to the senses, but Christ appealed to men's souls.

The passages above are the main sources for the idea in the early Fathers that the pagan legend of Orpheus in some way prefigures the story of Christ's ministry, and that just as the coming of Christ replaces the Old Law, so the coming of Christ the New Orpheus replaces the Old Orpheus of Helicon and Cithaeron. In addition to general treatments of the legend such as the above, Christian writers of this period

concentrated on two particular features of the Orpheus story, his alleged eloquence and his descent to the underworld. Often these writers describe Christ in opposition to Orpheus without actually naming Orpheus himself, and thus certain features of the legend are silently transferred to the story of Christ's ministry and deeds.

St. Ephraim of Syria (b. 306 A.D.) wrote a collection of beautiful poems called the Nisibene hymns, one of which, apparently based on the Apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, is a dialogue between Death and Satan concerning the power of Christ and the harrowing of Hell. Death speaks of himself as a great conqueror, ". . . as for wise that are able to charm wild beasts, their charms enter not into my ears," apparently alluding to the fact that Orpheus was unable successfully to liberate his wife from Hades. "Death ended his speech of derision: and the voice of our Lord sounded into Hell, and He cried aloud and burst the graves one by one. Tremblings took hold on Death . . . the dead came forth" (5-11, PNF, pp. 196-7).

The remarkable longevity of this idea, that Christ succeeded in the underworld where Orpheus failed,

can be seen as late as the 17th century in the work of Alexander Ross. Ross is fully conscious of the dangers to orthodoxy which may result from confusing Orpheus with Christ. He points out that, despite the apparent similarities, only Christ is the "True Orpheus"<sup>13</sup> and develops this point of view from an allegorical interpretation of the Orpheus legend itself:

It was he [Christ] onley who went down to hell to recover the church his spouse who had lost herself, by running away from Aristeas, even goodness itselfe; and delighting her selfe among the grasse and floweres of pleasure, was stung by that old serpent the Devil. What was in vain attempted by Orpheus, was truely performed by our Saviour, for he alone hath delivered our soules from the nethermost hell. (Mystagoqus Poeticus, 1653, pp. 388-9)

By the 5th century A.D. treatments of the Orpheus material by Clement, Eusebius, and Ephraim, among others, had made the story sufficiently familiar and useful to Christian writers to allow metaphoric comparison between Christ and Orpheus to become relatively common. In an

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<sup>13</sup>For a Medieval intermediary in the transmission of this idea, see the Easter hymn "Morte Christi Celebrata," a few verses of which deal with the way in which Christ saved the Church from the underworld and so became "our" that is, the Christian, Orpheus: "Sponsam suam ab inferno/ Regno locans in superno/ Noster traxit Orpheus" (Anal. Hymn. VIII, 30).





epigram on David, often attributed to the 5th-century Pope Damasus, but more probably by Hieronymus Presbyter, the poet asks, "who can hesitate to believe [that] the power of Christ rules all things, which united the various tongues under one song that the animals and birds could know God?" (Epigrammata Damasiana, ed. A. Ferrua, Rome, 1942, p. 228). This question seems to draw upon at least three sources--the prophecy of Isaiah regarding the coming of a Messiah under whose reign "the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid" (11:16); the legend of Orpheus' enchantment of the animals, which gave them, for a moment, reason; and Clement's discussion of the Logos as a harmonizing force among men, bringing the different nations together in peace. But in the Damasian epigram, all of these notions are compressed in a metaphor, and Christ is simply endowed with the powers and attributes of Orpheus.

The power of sacred eloquence was often associated with the eloquence of Orpheus in the work of the Fathers, though more as a convenient metaphor than as an extended comparison. For example, Gregory writes, "Strife subdues but gentleness restores a man, softening him by gentle and blandishing words, however wild



he may be, even as the strength of the fire softens iron. The lyre of Orpheus, which was his eloquence, I think, by the sweetness of his song, attracted all, good and bad alike" (Carmen LXII, PG 37, 1535).

Perhaps the last writer to mention Orpheus who may properly be called antique was Procopius (b. 465 A.D.), and it is fitting to end our discussion of Orpheus in Christian antiquity with him. This writer wished to show how the ancient prophets, theologians and philosophers were never able to convince their audiences as effectively as the eloquent evangelist Mark. When the pagans spoke, they spoke in the words of men, but when Mark spoke, it was with the words of God. "Orpheus having calmed wild creatures by the sweetness of his words did not persuade his fellow Thracians." Procopius adds that such pagans as Pythagoras, Democritus, and Orpheus, with their cryptic theories, vain wisdom and idle tales, could not convince their audience that the words they spoke were true, whereas Mark, imbued with the holy spirit, could and did (Encom. in Marc. 5, PG 100, 1192).

By the 5th century Christian writers were making use of an Orpheus who no longer represented a threat to Christianity and indeed may have had almost no associations

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with the mystery cults prevalent in the East under Graeco-Roman civilization. It was not his religious associations, then, which interested the later Fathers so much as a combination of the universal and timeless appeal of his legend and the utility of that legend as a trope. This trope became a part of the Christian rhetorical arsenal and, in large part, accounts for the frequent references to Orpheus by subsequent Christian writers.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ORPHEUS IN ANTIQUE ART

The large number of art works representing Orpheus which have survived from late antiquity speak for the popularity which his legend must have enjoyed with artisans and their patrons during the decline of the Empire and the rise of the Christian Church. Between the 2nd and the 6th centuries A.D. Orpheus appears in almost every form of Imperial art--in funerary sculpture throughout the Empire, in East Christian ivory caskets or pyxides, in brilliantly colored mosaics adorning the floors of houses, baths, and funeral chapels, in Coptic textiles, in Samian ware, in Roman catacomb and Jewish synagogue frescoes, and in a curious Graeco-Egyptian magical amulet.

During this period, while the main features of the legend remain the same, the interests and commonplaces of the age are revealed in several features of Orpheus' iconography. Because the themes and motifs most popular in Orpheus scenes group themselves in



large measure according to media, I have chosen to consider them by media in this chapter and will discuss them as follows:

(1) In the medium of mosaic, the 55 extant examples all depict Orpheus with the animals he is supposed to have charmed. In these scenes his position and his relation to the animals show the influence of regional tastes as well as of the official art which began to develop under the reign of Constantine.

(2) The influence of the mosaics is strongly evident in another medium of antique art, that of ivory carving. Here we find depicted the same scenes of Orpheus with the animals, but he assumes more of the nature of a shepherd or herder, becoming a more pastoral figure than he was in classical antiquity.

(3) A category of one--the medium of intaglio--contains the only example known to me of Orpheus on a Graeco-Egyptian magical amulet. This gem shows a crucified man with seven stars and a crescent above his head; below him is the inscription: "Orpheus Bacchus."



(4) In the medium of funerary sculpture a different association appears to have been important to the commissioners of Orpheus scenes. This was Orpheus' connection with Christ the Good Shepherd and Mithras the bull-slayer. In this medium the sheep, of all the animals with which Orpheus is shown, becomes the most important.

(5) The theme of the Good Shepherd receives more extensive treatment in catacomb frescoes where Orpheus with his sheep becomes Christ the Good Shepherd bearing the lost sheep of the soul to the heavens.

#### Mosaic

Hellenic and Hellenistic art had often portrayed Orpheus in the underworld or emerging from it with his wife, but all the extant Imperial mosaics I am familiar with show him charming the animals in the upper world. Various explanations have been offered for this shift in emphasis from one aspect of the legend to the other. Doro Levi has argued that "in the great majority of [late antique] monuments the myth is a mere pretext

for the generic representations of animal types" (Anti-och Mosaic Pavements, I, 362). This view is open to some question. The commissioners of mosaics who had wanted "generic representations of animal types" on the floors of their houses could and did have them. They did not have to have Orpheus too. His presence with the animals suggests that the legend had some significance for them which animals alone did not have. But Levi is surely correct in assuming that people were becoming increasingly fond of animal representations about the time that Orpheus mosaics became popular. Mosaics of gladiatorial, hunting, fishing, and pastoral animal scenes were common throughout the Empire by the end of the 2nd century A.D.<sup>1</sup>

The Roman colonies of Asia Minor and Africa were the source of descriptions and pictures of a number of wild animals as well as of the animals themselves which were imported to Italy and to the western provinces to be used as exotic housepets and, more notably, as popular attractions at the public games and Spectacula. Since only the wealthy could have owned and maintained

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<sup>1</sup>Henri Stern, "Mosaïque d'Orphée," Gallia, XIII (1955), 64-65, discusses the interest in hunting scenes.

as pets such animals as the lion, tiger, and ocelot, it is not improbable that these and other such animals might have taken on an aura of the fashionable life, and this association may explain the presence of exotic animals in mosaics of middle-class homes in provinces where they would never be known naturally. Scenes of Orpheus in Hellenic times had shown him with deer, birds, and an occasional panther or lynx--animals sacred to Dionysus.<sup>2</sup> But the Orpheus mosaics of the 2nd and later centuries A.D., even in Italy, Gaul, and Britain, show him surrounded by lions, tigers, apes, rhinoceri and elephants, as well as African and Asian birds such as the ostrich (Figs. 1, 2, 3).

Another explanation for the presence of the same animals in mosaics in widely separated parts of the Empire is that offered by Henri Stern and J. M. C. Toynbee.<sup>3</sup> They hold that the artisans in mosaic, as

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<sup>2</sup>A 6th century B. C. Boetian cup shows a bearded Orpheus surrounded by five birds and a doe. It was published by O. Kern, Athenische Abteilung LXIII, LXIV (1938-39). He is accompanied by a doe, a panther and birds on a Greek mirror of the 5th century B.C. See W. Froehner, La Collection Tyszwicz (Munich, 1892), pl. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Stern, p. 50; J. M. C. Toynbee, Art in Roman Britain (London, 1963), p. 14.

in other arts, used pattern books. While marked similarities between certain pavements certainly suggest the employment of pattern books, none to my knowledge has survived. We might expect, however, that if such recorded designs existed, as I think they did, the manner in which they were passed on would bear some resemblance to the way in which present-day fashions travel outward from the House of Dior to the Sears and Roebucks of many small and distant communities. Just as the styles of women's clothing set in Paris, Madrid, and New York may be seen in smaller cities for several years after they have ceased to be fashionable in the capitals, so Roman mosaic patterns may have enjoyed a long life in the province by means of such pattern books.

The Orpheus mosaics from the 2nd to the 6th centuries tend to divide themselves into two main styles, eastern and western,<sup>4</sup> which becomes more distinct in the late Empire, when western mosaics grow increasingly decorative and formal. In the eastern Mediterranean regions--roughly speaking, from Greece down through Asia Minor to Egypt--narrative art had enjoyed continuous

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<sup>4</sup>M. Chéhab, Mosaïques du Liban (Paris, 1957), p. 67 ff.

popularity from the time of the earliest civilizations. The narrative tradition continued unabated throughout the years of Roman ascendancy, and this generalization holds true for the Orpheus mosaics as well. In the eastern parts of the Empire Orpheus is usually pictured in the center of the composition, the animals grouped around him or arranged in registers; rarely are there separating decorative elements. Two examples of this style are mosaics from Ptolemais and from a funeral chapel in Edessa (Figs. 4, 5).<sup>5</sup> In both we see Orpheus with the animals at his knees, quite evidently charmed by his song. The latest of all extant Orpheus pavements is one from a funeral chapel in Jerusalem (Fig. 6), northwest of the Damascus Gate. It has been dated in the 6th century A.D.<sup>6</sup> This piece is perhaps the

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<sup>5</sup>The pavement from Edessa, now Turkish Urfa, was first published by J. B. Segal, "New Mosaics from Edessa," Archeology XII (1959).

<sup>6</sup>See H. Vincent, "Une Mosaïque Byzantine à Jerusalem," Revue Biblique X (1901), P. Bagatti, "Il Musaico dell' Orfeo a Gerusalemme," Rivista d'Archeologia Christiana XXVIII (1954), 159, and M. Avi-Yonah, "Mosaic Pavements in Palestine," Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine II (1932). Avi-Yonah supports Vincent's date because the costume worn by the women in the lowest register of the mosaic appears in the 6th century.

most narrative of all the mosaics. Here Orpheus charms the animals while Pan holds his syrinx, pointing to the effects of rational stringed music on the passions of anger and lust, symbolized by a lazing centaur beside him.<sup>7</sup>

In the western part of the Empire, on the other hand, only the earlier mosaics reflect the narrative emphasis of Hellenic art; these mosaics seem especially derivative of the early fresco style of southern Italy which we associate with the wall paintings of Pompei and Herculaneum (See Fig. 7). By the 3rd century A. D. provincial artisans, finding their models from the capital increasingly alien and--one suspects--difficult to execute, began to abandon large, narrative compositions for simpler, compartmented designs which could be done one section at a time. Late Orpheus mosaics from Gaul and Britain place Orpheus and the animals in quite separate geometrical compartments--square, rectangular, quatrefoil, circular. Most of the

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<sup>7</sup>This creature was traditionally a figure for the appetitive faculties. Cornelius à Lapide, Commentaria in Jeremiam (Leyden, 1622), p. 26 quotes Saint Basil to this effect: "Men are created like centaurs, as they were made rational men in the upper parts, and in their lower parts made like lustful and burning horses." The statement is given at greater length in the Anthologia of Stobaeus.

British mosaics known to us are circular--for example, the Woodchester and Barton Villa mosaics (Figs. 8, 9). A mosaic from the Casa Consula in Split is a variation upon this circular pattern (Fig. 10). In a pavement from the Forêt de Brotonne at Rouen (Fig. 11) Orpheus is in a circular medallion while the animals are in squares, as are the four seasons in the corners competing with the animals for compositional interest. A somewhat similar mosaic from St. Romain-en-Galle (Fig. 12) uses an eight-sided figure for the compartments. Owing to the nature of the separating elements in such western mosaics the animals, no longer in herds, go about on their own business and as their relation to Orpheus is less apparent, some of the pastoral flavor of the scene is lost.

Another way of classifying Orpheus mosaics is according to the manner of his dress. Henri Stern has noted two types: those in which Orpheus wears Greek garb and those in which he wears Phrygian. The Greek Orpheus is naked or dressed in a chiton and mantle, bareheaded or crowned with laurel, while the Phrygian type wears the Phrygian bonnet, a tunic with long sleeves, Persian slippers and often a long mantle gathered over

the left shoulder. The Greek appears to be the older version, going back to the 7th century B.C., and is rarely found in Imperial art. The Phrygian type is the most common in mosaics and ultimately becomes the model for Orpheus in Christian art. An early example of it occurs on a vase of the 4th century B.C. where Orpheus is shown in Phrygian dress charming women and animals. Apparently, Stern notes, the Phrygian type was common by the time of Pausanias, for, in describing a painting of the underworld by Polygnotus, he seems surprised that Orpheus is portrayed in Greek garb without the Phrygian bonnet: "Turning our gaze again to the lower part of the picture we see . . . [that] the appearance of Orpheus is Greek, and neither his garb nor his headgear is Thracian" (X, 9).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>It will be noted that Pausanias' description resembles in certain particulars those in the ekphras-eis of Philostratus and Callistratus. Stern feels that the descriptions of these writers make no contributions to Orpheus iconography since they wrote in the 3rd century A.D. or later, but that there may have been a statue of Orpheus somewhere in Philippolis, Thrace, his putative home, which established the mosaic conventions (p. 59). Such a statue has not as yet been found.



A more significant distinction among the Orpheus mosaics would seem to be that which can be made of the various positions in which Orpheus is shown. In classical antiquity Orpheus was usually represented in underworld scenes as standing, and in scenes where he tames the animals, as sitting. Philostratus writes of a seated Orpheus: ". . . his left foot resting on the ground supports the lyre which rests on his thigh, his right foot marks the time by beating on the ground with its sandal" (*Imaq.* 6). Although Philostratus is here describing a Pompeian wall painting (Fig. 7),<sup>9</sup> the position, with certain variations, is a traditional one in the early Orpheus mosaics. Most of these show Orpheus seated on a rock, with his lyre supported on the left thigh, the left foot flat on the ground and the right leg slightly bent, occasionally outstretched as in the mosaics from Oudna and Newton-St.-Loe<sup>10</sup> (Figs. 13, 14). A few mosaics, perhaps developing from the Pompei fresco, show a reversal of this position, with the lyre on the right thigh.

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<sup>9</sup>See Roscher, *Lexicon*, III, 1178.

<sup>10</sup>On the question of the latter's relation to other pavements in Roman Britain, see G. R. Stanton, "The Newton-St.-Loe Pavement," *JRS* XXVI (1936), 44 ff.

This basic position, with its minor variations, is most likely an attempt to make Orpheus look more lifelike, and to avoid having him sit on the rock, legs dangling, like Humpty-Dumpty on the wall, as is suggested by the awkward positioning in a mosaic from Rottweil (Fig. 15). These early pavements all share, in one way or another, a pose which may be called the asymmetrical position.

Towards the end of the 4th century A.D. Orpheus appears in a new, frontal pose in mosaic pavements. While we may assume that by this time artisans in mosaic no longer had so great a technical knowledge or ability as their predecessors in rendering three-dimensional, anatomically complex scenes, certain features of the new pose point to a stylistic influence more significant than a mere decline in skill.

In order best to examine this frontal development of the later mosaics, we might consider first a mosaic from Blanzky-les-Fîmes (Fig. 1), which Stern feels is not Gaulish in style but rather Italian or North-african. He dates it, because of the clumsiness of execution, in the 4th century A.D. Perhaps the most striking feature of this pavement is the fact that the

lyre has been shifted from its traditional place on Orpheus' thigh and now rests on a small stand. The entire composition is more formal and symmetrical than any we have examined before. The lyre and its base are almost equal in size to Orpheus and his seat. He is framed by two trees whose branches turn inward to form an arbor for him, in a style which is characteristic of the late Orpheus statuary of the eastern provinces. Three animals are arranged in registers on each side of the trees. The entire composition is based on doublets--two central figures, two trees, two animal groups, two pairs of birds. It should be noted, moreover, that Orpheus faces front and that he is not so much engaged in playing his lyre, in the Hellenic tradition of natural movement, as he is engaged in displaying it and himself. His legs are awkwardly foreshortened and, while not forming a perfect diamond shape, they are symmetrically arranged.

We can see somewhat the same symmetry in a mosaic from the Isle of Wight (Fig. 16) which J. M. C. Toynbee dates in the 4th century on the basis of artifacts found at the site (p. 14). The positioning of the legs, the displaced lyre and the parallel sets of

animals in this mosaic are remarkably like those at Blanzky. But both of these mosaics are in turn strongly suggestive of a common model which, if established, would date them on stylistic grounds as well, as created either during or after the reign of Constantine.

We will recall that in Constantine's time depictions of the emperor and various consuls in a frontal pose began to replace the earlier profile and three-quarter Imperial portraits. André Grabar, in L'Empereur dans L'Art Byzantine (Paris, 1936), observes that the image of the emperor throned in majesty was common on early Roman coins, but that he was usually represented in profile and in the midst of the composition. In the reign of Constantine, the throned emperor became frontal and was placed in the center of a symmetrical composition, though raised above his subjects (pp. 24, 197). In diptych portraits of this period the emperor or regional consul is portrayed in the same flat style from the front, often with right hand raised as a sign of power, sometimes holding a scepter or volumen. Thus, in a consular diptych of the early 6th century A.D. (Fig. 17), the consul Anastasius is seated on a throne in a symmetrical niche or aedicula, holding a scepter

in the left hand. His legs are foreshortened, and the interest is focused on his torso and head, which is nimbed. Above him are symmetrically balanced portraits and pairs of winged children; beneath his throne are parallel human and animal groups.

This officially sanctioned style was rapidly assimilated into Christian art, with Christ, the "all-ruler" (pantokrator or pambasileus), assuming the Imperial pose, his raised right hand holding the orb and cross.<sup>11</sup> The two Orpheus mosaics mentioned earlier may profitably be compared to such works of East Christian art. In the same respect we may recall the pavement from Ptolemais (Fig. 4) which Harrison would date in the late 4th or early 5th century A.D. He speaks of

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<sup>11</sup> According to the Liber Pontificalis, ed. Duchesne, I, 172, Constantine ordered a piece of goldwork to be made in this style. For patristic discussions of Imperial art, and attitudes toward the  $\pi\alpha\nu\tau\omicron\kappa\rho\alpha\tau\omicron\rho$   $\rho\alpha\mu\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\varsigma$  theme, see pseudo-Chrysostom, PG 59, 650; Eusebius, Pan. Const. passim; and John Damascene, PG 94, 1380. Prudentius gives a concise statement: "O Christ, the one name, the glory and strength of the Father, creator of earth and sky and founder of this city, who has set up the sceptre of the world on Rome's high citadel, ordaining that the world obey the toga of Quirinus and yield to his arms, that thou might'st bring under one system of laws the customs and observances, the speech and character and worship of nations . . ." (Perist. II, 412 ff.).

the "balanced symmetry of the composition [which] looks, not back to earlier Roman art, but forward to Byzantine."<sup>12</sup> This piece features the frontal pose, symmetrical leg and foot placement, parallel groups of animals in threes, displaced lyre and a nimbus, which I shall consider further on.

The pavement of Jerusalem (Fig. 6), made in the 6th century, shows the development of the style seen in the Ptolemais floor. The lyre has been shifted almost off the thigh so that Orpheus' position resembles the Imperial pose with raised hand; there are parallel tree and animal groups; the legs are symmetrical; and the folds of the drapery covering them emphasize their "X" configuration, which is in turn developed by the axes which bisect Pan and the centaur at the bottom of the composition. The close relation of late frontal-style Orpheus mosaics to Imperial and Pambasileus iconography becomes clearer when we compare them with a 9th-century illustration of the second coming, probably modeled on a 4th or 5th century original, from a

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<sup>12</sup>R. M. Harrison, "An Orpheus Mosaic at Ptolemais in Cyrenaica," JRS LII (1962), p. 16, compares the Ptolemais mosaic to a silver platter of the Emperor Theodosius the First.

codex of Cosmas Indicopleustes (Fig. 18). The nimbed Christ holds a book in his left hand, slightly displaced from the left thigh, in the same way that Orpheus holds his lyre in the Jerusalem pavement. Christ's right hand, fingers extended, points towards the book, just as the right hand of Orpheus touches the lyre strings (and as the right hand with quill in the Ptolemais mosaic pointed towards the lyre). Christ's majesty over the two registers of attentive spectators arranged in symmetrical groups can profitably be compared to Orpheus' power over the two registers of attentive animals in a 4th-century mosaic, with displaced lyre, from Saragossa (Fig. 19). In the Jerusalem mosaic, Orpheus is placed above the figures in the lower registers, as is the Pambasileus in the Cosmas codex, and both persons look fixedly out at the spectator, quite oblivious of the other members of the composition.

The eagle. Finally, one more feature of Roman Orpheus mosaic seems to call for comment. A number of mosaics, both early and late, as well as many representations of Orpheus in other media, show, closely associated with him, an eagle. All of the mosaics contain various birds, some of which might be eagles, but those

in which the bird is clearly an eagle are found at: the Piazza Amerina (Fig. 3), Charchell (Fig. 20), Cos (Fig. 21), Leptis Magnis (Fig. 22), Perugia (Fig. 2), Jerusalem (Fig. 6), and Saragossa (Fig. 19). The Pompeii fresco (Fig. 7) which may have served as a source for some of the Orpheus mosaics, shows an eagle with wings outstretched in what appears to be a nest above the musician, while an eagle perches on the shoulder of Orpheus in the synagogue fresco at Dura-Europos (Fig. 23).

Philostratus felt that the eagle, a bird of God, was somehow intimately related to Orpheus. "And pray do not fail to note carefully . . . the eagle of Zeus. The eagle poised aloft on both his wings gazes intently at Orpheus and pays no heed to the hare nearby" (*Imag.* 6). What was the significance of this bird, which made him so popular in Orpheus scenes?

First, the eagle and other birds were often associated with wise men in majesty, and it will be remembered that, among other things, Orpheus was considered a sage in antiquity. In the magical amulet representing Solomon, an eagle or a hoopoe brings him



information<sup>13</sup> (Fig. 24). In an 11th century psalter we see David the harper in the pose of the pantokrator, with divine inspiration entering him in the guise of a bird (Fig. 25). Since Orpheus the sage and divinely inspired musician is certainly in the tradition of Solomon and David, it would not do for birds to be absent from his representations.

But more important, for the consideration of the Roman mosaics, was the eagle's association with death. We know that in the ancient East and in Roman and Christian funeral art the eagle was charged with the task of bearing the soul to the heavens. Franz Cumont mentions a stele found in Rome and now in the Copenhagen museum on which is shown a young man in a toga seated on an eagle which is rising into the sky while a winged, torch-bearing child (Phosphor) illuminates the way for the pair.<sup>14</sup> There was artistic precedent for Orpheus and the eagle in mosaic, according to Martial, who observed that on the ascent up the

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<sup>13</sup> See Giacomo Manganaro, "Nuovi Documenti Magici della Sicilia Orientale," Atti della Accademia Nazionale Dei Lincei XVIII (1963) tav. II, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Etudes Syriennes (Paris, 1917), p. 87, Fig. 39.

Esquiline from the Suburra was the Lacus Orphei, one of the reservoirs of Rome, where there was a statue of Orpheus surrounded by the animals. "There you will notice Orpheus spray-sprinkled, crowning his drenched audience, and the wild beasts marvelling at his song, and the Monarch's bird that bore to the Thunderer the ravished Phrygian" (X, xix).

The Romans used the eagle as a symbol for the apotheosis of the emperor, as in the carving on the Arch of Titus (Fig. 26). To dream of an eagle was to dream of death, according to Artemidorus, for eagles were sent aloft at the burning of the emperor's remains (Oniroc. I, 20). Herodian tells us that this custom symbolized the bearing of the ruler's soul from earth to heaven (IV, 2, xi). Dio Cassius, speaking of the funeral of Augustus, said that "an eagle, having been released, seized the soul and bore it to the heavens" (LVI, 42), and in another place, "an eagle flew away and Pertinax became immortal" (LXXIV, 5). From earliest times the soul was thought of as winged and visualized as a bird, as in a mummy portrait from Roman Egypt (Fig. 27) where in the lowest register the soul of Artimidorus returns to the body in this form.

Synesius used the word *πτερόνοος* to describe the soul (PG 66, 1293). The eagle symbolizes the soul of the dead man rising towards the heavens in a sarcophagus from Sidon (Fig. 28) and in a dome of a 7th century A.D. Christian tomb at El-Bagawât (Fig. 29). A somewhat less pagan version of the latter example may be found on the dome of the Church of the Redeemer in Athens (Fig. 30).<sup>15</sup>

In Christian antiquity the eagle often symbolized Christ the psychopompos who led the soul to heaven. For example, some 7th century Coptic tombstones carved with eagles (Figs. 31, 32) bear the inscriptions *Ⲅⲓ ⲛⲟⲩ ⲛⲟⲩ ⲛⲟⲩ*, "being saved in God."<sup>16</sup> Such

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<sup>15</sup> On the eagle and the soul generally, see Franz Cumont, RHR (1910 and 1911). For the eagle in Syrian funeral art, see M. Meudrac and L. Albanèse, "A Travers Les Nécropoles Gréco-Romaines de Sidon, Bull. Mus. de Beyrouth XI (1938), 79-81, and S. Rongevall, "L'Aigle Funéraire en Syrie," Mélanges de la Faculté Orientale de Beyrouth V (1912), 2. On the tomb at El-Bagawât, see W. de Bock, Materiaux pour Servir à l'Archéologie de l'Égypte Chrétienne (St. Petersburg, 1901).

<sup>16</sup> For other examples of eagles on stelae with and without crosses, see W. E. Crum, Coptic Monuments (Cairo, 1902), pl. XLII, 8647, 48; LXIII, 8649, 50. J. Kirsch, "L'Aigle sur les Monuments Figurés de l'Antiquité Chrétienne," Bulletin d'Ancienne Littérature et d'Archéologie Chrétiennes (1913), points out that the eagle is more common in East Christian than in West Christian contexts, but then such is the case in the Orpheus pavements.

eagles were also common in Coptic textiles and frescoes. One piece of embroidery (Fig. 33) shows an eagle with a cross in a bulla or medallion around its neck, and we note much the same device in a funeral chapel fresco from the monastery of St. Apollo at Bawît (Fig. 34). Compare these eagles and their crosses with the one that perches next to Orpheus in the funeral chapel pavement from Jerusalem (fig. 6).

Thus, while no extant Roman mosaic shows Orpheus in the underworld, his importance there may not have been so much overlooked as we have been led to believe. The presence of the eagle in many Orpheus pavements, and certainly in those which occur in pagan and Christian funeral chapels, serves as a reminder of his power over death. And, as we shall see, the conflation of Orpheus with Christ the psychopompos in Christian funerary sculpture only carries one step further an association already implicit in the Roman mosaics.

Christians familiar with the phrase from Psalm CII, 5, "so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's,"

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Kirsch also gives a list of monuments, particularly of Gallo-Roman ones, with eagles in various Christian contexts.

and the commentaries on it by St. Ambrose (PL 16, 420) and Maximus of Taur (PL 57, 366), where the soul sheds the plumage of the Old Man and is reborn in heaven by grace, could hardly fail to understand the symbolism of the eagle in the Jerusalem pavement. Moreover, this eagle in conjunction with Orpheus, who by the 6th century A.D. had been established as a type of Christ, would perhaps have reminded such an observer of this gloss by the pseudo-Ambrose: "[By the eagle] we ought to understand Christ our Lord, who after resurrection worthy of reverence, and which taught mankind to look forward to a life after death, flew back to the Father, just like the eagle" (PL 17, 718).

### Pyxides

A fairly common medium in late antique art was that of ivory carving. The tusk of an elephant was cut in hollow sections--each like a large piece of macaroni--which were fitted with lids and bottoms, carved in relief and used as caskets for jewelry and other valuables, and later by the Christians as receptacles for sacred objects. Two such small caskets or pyxides

show Orpheus surrounded by animals--one at Bobbio, the other at the Bargello Museum in Florence (Figs. 35, 36). They were probably made in the 5th or 6th centuries A. D.

The most important point of contact between these pyxides and the Orpheus mosaics, and one which bears out O. M. Dalton's contention that "some of the . . . Syro-Egyptian pyxides and diptychs of the fifth and sixth centuries may copy mosaic originals,"<sup>17</sup> is the presence of the centaur and other mythological, half-human creatures. The centaur is found in conjunction with Orpheus, to my knowledge, only in East Christian art. A Coptic textile (Fig. 37) similar to the Jerusalem mosaic and to the ivory pyxides suggests that there must have been a common type for this scene in the East. In western Orpheus mosaic, most of the animals, though they may be exotic, are plainly animals. But in the Jerusalem pavement, as in the Bobbio and Bargello caskets, the centaur takes a place at the lower left of the scene.

It is interesting to see how the inclusion of the centaur, Pan and other such creatures who had

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<sup>17</sup> Byzantine Art and Archaeology (Oxford, 1916), p. 182.

nothing to do with the original Orpheus legend, as well as the great variety of exotic animals around Orpheus, helped to make the legend less fixed in form. About the time of the East Christian pyxides we begin to see a number of animal scenes with figures other than Orpheus occupying the musician's position in them. An East Christian ivory diptych of Adam naming the animals (Fig. 38) shows Orpheus' eagle above the other animals, hovering at Adam's shoulder. This bird, as well as the profusion of animals, suggests that the artist may have been looking at a carving of Orpheus when he made the diptych. A relief from Knole Castle (Fig. 39) shows a shepherd Orpheus pipinq to the animals, and a somewhat similar scene occurs in a Coptic textile (Fig. 40). But perhaps the most remarkable adaptation of the Orpheus type to other material is an oriental manuscript miniature (Fig. 41), probably of the 15th or 16th century and certainly modeled on a late antique original. It shows Plato charming the animals with his music (the music of the spheres?), playing the organ rather than the lyre. Moreover, the animals' pleasure at the music--they roll on their backs in delight--is somewhat more evident than was usual in Orpheus representations.

It should be noted that all of the pieces mentioned here are in a flat, symmetrical style, all foreground and little distance, and that the scenes of Adam and Plato are vertically arranged as though their poses had been copied from mosaics or pyxides.

### The Magical Amulet

A number of engraved gems, cameos and coins from the Roman period show Orpheus among the animals. On the whole, all of these pieces are rather traditional and add little to the legend. One, however, shows Orpheus neither in Hades nor among the animals, but on the cross (Figs. 42a, b, c). This piece of hematite, which is in the Berlin Museum, appears to be a magical amulet by which its owner hoped to obtain for his soul an immortal existence among the stars. The piece is inscribed, in the fashion of contemporary magical amulets, in such a way as to be read directly, rather than from an impression: O P Ø E O C B A K K  
I K O C.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See Campbell Bonner, Studies in Magic Amulets (Ann Arbor, 1950) for this distinction between seals and amulets.



Andre Boulanger has rejected the view that the amulet was the property of a member of the Orphic religion who was converted to Christianity,<sup>19</sup> on the grounds that the existence of any such religious group has yet to be proven. On the other hand, Boulanger's substitution of a Gnostic sect for an Orphic one leads us only to the first turn in the labyrinth.<sup>20</sup> One possible map is that offered by astrology.

In the Hellenistic age, astrology and the concept of astral fate were very important to the common man. Whereas in the classical period man had enjoyed

dealings with Zeus and Athena and Artemis, accessible and placable Greeks of a larger build . . . [now] he was under a universal law . . . we find under the Empire not merely a general rise in the importance of celestial divinities, but also the investing of Attis . . . with a starry cap on the coins of Pessinus and his invocation as "shepherd of the white stars" in a popular poem of the second century A.D.<sup>21</sup>

It was thought that the gods could overcome a man's individual fate if only one could persuade or coerce

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<sup>19</sup>This position was advanced by Robert Eisler, Orpheus the Fisher (London, 1925). Eisler's creative documentation in the tradition of John Payne Collier detracts from the value of his book.

<sup>20</sup>Orphée, pp. 147-148.

<sup>21</sup>A. D. Nock, Conversion (Oxford, 1933), p. 101.

them to, and one of the best ways to do this was to wear their images in amulets, sometimes set in rings, but probably most frequently strung on a thong around the neck. The desire to exert compulsion on the gods gave rise to the large numbers of magic and theurgic amulets and papyri produced during the 2nd and 5th centuries A. D., objects which were religious only in a limited sense. As A. A. Barb has pointed out,

. . . the religious man, offering his adoration in humble submission to the Deity . . . [is] always careful to add to any supplication the reservation "if it be according to thy will." On the other hand, we have the magician, attempting to force the supernatural powers to accomplish what he desires and avert what he fears.<sup>22</sup>

These theurgic amulets were for the most part products of Graeco-Egyptian culture and made in Alexandria. Some, Barb thinks, may have been engraved by Alexandrian Jews, who had a great reputation for magical abilities in the Roman period (p. 118). Such seems the case with our gem; the interest of Alexandrian Jews in a syncretic Orpheus has already been demonstrated.

The most interesting thing about both the gems and the magical papyri is what Bonner terms their

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<sup>22</sup> "The Survival of Magic Arts" in Paganism and Christianity, p. 101.

"internationalism" (p. 6). The amulets contain

. . . invocations to non-Greek deities, often accompanied by words that are sometimes corruptions of Egyptian, Hebrew and Aramaic letters. Such inscriptions are usually, but not always, accompanied by incised figures of various deities, sometimes the well-known gods of Greece in slightly Egyptianized forms, sometimes Egyptian gods more or less Hellenized in appearance, sometimes unfamiliar divine or demonic forms. (p. 67)

Those who wore these gems thought that a portrait of a deity or its name inscribed on an amulet gave the wearer power over that deity. To name a thing was to evoke it and control it, and, in the event that a god should go by more than one name--Greek, Egyptian or Hebrew as it might be--to summon him by as many names as possible would of course be most effective.

Such attitudes as this lay behind the often bizarre syncretism of Graeco-Egyptian magical objects. For example, a recipe for the treatment of madness is supposed to be Egyptian, but alludes to Pharoah's plague and to the crossing of the Red Sea, and invokes a daemon to help in the treatment, adjuring him by "Jesus the god of the Jews" (PGM IV, 3007-3085).<sup>23</sup> A phylactery of

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<sup>23</sup> There are seven references to Christ by name and more by attribute given in the index to the collection of Greek magical papyri edited by Preisendanz.

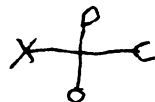
silver foil, found in Beirut and now in the Louvre, voices the appeals of one Alexandra to Sabaoth to protect her from demons. Sabaoth is a curious being. All nations, including the Greeks, thought that foreign names were the most potent for magical purposes. In Hebrew, Sabaoth meant hosts or armies, and the Israelites spoke of Jehovah as the lord of their hosts and armies. As the phrase was translated from Hebrew into the Greek of the LXX, a divine person whose name was Sabaoth came into being. When we see this name we can assume that the user had a knowledge of the Septuagint and an ignorance of Hebrew. Endings in "oth," the feminine plural, were common in the inscriptions of magical gems and were thought to be terminations of power.<sup>24</sup> Alexandra also calls upon the archons of the seven heavens, or presiding planetary deities, and on the god of Abraham, concluding, "the one God and his Christ, help Alexandra."<sup>25</sup> To this type of mind there would be nothing odd about conflating Christ, Orpheus, and Bacchus. Each combined a mortal and immortal nature,

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<sup>24</sup>See F. C. Burkitt, Church and Gnosis (Cambridge, 1932), pp. 36 ff. on Sabaoth and other such beings.

<sup>25</sup>Cited in Bonner, p. 102.

each had died a similar death, each had returned from the grave and each possessed the ability to grant others immortality. While it is true, so far as I know, that there is no similar conflation of all three together in antiquity, Christ and Old Testament figures commonly shared their powers with the pagan divinities in many magical objects and papyri.

A. A. Barb has recently published a most unusual amulet of this syncretic sort. The piece, now in the British Museum, represents on one face (Fig. 43) a bust of Christ, the saints, the adoration of the Magi and other New Testament scenes. The reverse (Fig. 44) contains Jewish inscriptions, the six-pointed star, the figure of Christ-Horus, symbols of the sun and moon and the Christian monogram , the whole being surrounded by the self-devouring Gnostic serpent, the Uroboros.<sup>26</sup> The Christ-Horus-Harpocrates syncretism was not uncommon in these objects. A Graeco-Egyptian piece at University College, London (Fig. 45) shows the figure of the young Harpocrates seated on a lotus, with the inscription, *Ιησους* (Jaweh, Jesus).

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<sup>26</sup> A. A. Barb, "Three Elusive Amulets," JWCI XXVII (1964), discusses Horus as a type of Christ.

These instances of Christ's connection with other religions and of his appearance on theurgic amulets show that the Orpheus amulet is by no means so completely without precedent as earlier students of the gem might have us believe. Let us consider more specifically various features of the amulet.

The Crucified Christ-Orpheus. One of the many interesting features of this amulet is the fact that it contains one of the earliest representations of the crucifixion, if not the earliest, on a gem stone. R. Zahn maintains that, by the style of the inscription, this gem cannot be dated later than the 3rd century A.D.,<sup>27</sup> and it seems very unlikely that it is earlier than the 2nd. The main difficulty in dating the Orpheus

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<sup>27</sup> "OPΘEOΞ BAKKIKOΞ," AΓΓ EΛOΞ II (1926), 62-63. Franz Dolger, Ichthus I (Rome, 1910), 324, has dated it in the 5th century A.D., but it is doubtful if carvings of this sort were made that late. The Orpheus intaglio is much closer in style to the gems of the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. Zahn questions the authenticity of the gem but offers no evidence, other than the fact that he has never seen one like it before, that it is suspect. As Bonner has pointed out, there has been an inordinate amount of discussion devoted to the supposed forging of thousands of magical gems during the Renaissance. The kinds of gems which the antiquaries of the period desired, however, were much more elaborate and Hellenic in style, as can be seen from a glance through the pages of Montfaucon, Macarius and Maffei. Because a gem is unusual, it is not necessarily false.

intaglio has been that the style of the crucifixion depicted on it is very late. The bent-kneed figure of Christ, with feet nailed over each other, is not known in Christian art before the 13th century, and becomes popular only in the 14th and 15th centuries. The early Christians did not ordinarily represent Christ on the cross at all until the 6th century. The few exceptions which did so are, in most cases, not completely Christian.<sup>28</sup> Rather, the cross was shown in various forms, either bare or surmounted by a bust of Christ (Fig. 46), or by the hand of God. Only in gems, with two exceptions to my knowledge, do we find early representations of Christ crucified.<sup>29</sup>

The gems which show scenes of the crucifixion are: the Orpheus intaglio in the Berlin Museum; a red jasper from Gaza in Syria, now in the British Museum, showing a crucified nimbed figure with two attendants (Fig. 47); a carnelian in the British Museum,

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<sup>28</sup>The first dated use of the cross even by itself on a Christian monument occurs as late as 134 A.D. in a Palmyrian inscription. See C. DeVogüé, Les Inscriptions Sémitiques (1868-77), 76, p. 55.

<sup>29</sup>See L. Bréhier, Les Origines du Crucifix dans l'Art Religieux (Paris, 1908).

found in Constanza, Rumania, showing the crucified Christ with apostles (Fig. 48); and another of similar subject matter from Rome (Fig. 49). All but the Orpheus intaglio appear to have been made during the 3rd or 4th centuries A.D.

In other media there may have been full-scale crucifixion scenes earlier than the Rabula Gospels of 586 A.D., for Prudentius seems to allude to them as early as the 4th century in his Dittochaeon, a guide-book to scenes from the Old and New Testaments depicted on church walls. "Pierced through either side, Christ gives forth water and blood. . . . at this time two robbers on crosses close by on either side are at variance. The one denies God, the other wears the crown" (XLII). Corroborative evidence for this description, however, is lacking. Thus we are left with only engraved gems for evidence about the earliest crucifixion scenes, save for two notable exceptions.

The first exception is a graffito from the Palace of the Caesars at Rome (Fig. 50), showing the crucified Christ with the head of an ass or of the god Seth-Typhon. Because the graffito is very helpful for our understanding of the Berlin gem, it seems



best to digress a bit and outline the background of this curious inscription.

In 1856 four small rooms, which may have been schoolrooms or guard rooms or both, were discovered in the excavations of the Palace of the Caesars on Palatine Hill. The inscription reads: "Alexamenos worships (his) god." An inscription in another one of the rooms reads, "ΑΙΞΑΜΕΝΟC F I D E - L I S." Fidelis was a Christian epithet, but we note that it is in Latin and the name of Alexamenos is given in Greek. Perhaps it was added by another hand. This drawing has been dated about 150-250 A.D.<sup>30</sup> It was, therefore, scratched on the wall of the room at about the same time that the Orpheus gem in the Berlin Museum was made, and like it portrays a quite un-Christian crucifixion.

Some have thought that the crucified figure in the graffito is Seth-Typhon, the Egyptian god of the lower world. He was an enemy of Osiris and an embodiment of evil; if one wished to lay a curse on an enemy, Seth's was a good name to invoke. The

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<sup>30</sup> J. S. Northcote and W. R. Brownlow, Roma Sotterranea (London, 1879), p. 345.

letter Y, which can be seen in the upper right hand corner of the drawing, is the bivium or magic sign found on Sethian defixiones tabellae or curse tablets, and denotes the power of the god over the lower world. The graffito, in this view, is neither a caricature of Christ nor a crucifixion, but rather a drawing of the Sethian Alexamenos worshipping his god.<sup>31</sup>

The main difficulty with this interpretation is that there is no evidence that Seth was ever worshipped as a god, by Gnostic Sethians or by any other sect. It seems more likely that the Sethians were named after the biblical Seth, the father of men. The Egyptian Seth seems always to have been an evil deity, invoked either like the bogeyman, for corrective purposes,<sup>32</sup> or else as a purely magical power. Evidence for Seth in Gnostic theology is meager. Epiphanius says that the third archon is named Seth (Ad Haer. XXVI, PG 41, 345). In company with other archons he might have been invoked in magical objects, but it is

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<sup>31</sup>R. Wuensch, Sethianische Verfluchungstafeln (Leipzig, 1898).

<sup>32</sup>See the charming account of Seth and the winged womb in A. A. Barb's "Diva Matrix," JWCI XVI (1953).

highly unlikely that he would have been worshipped as a deity by himself.

The graffito is, to my mind, quite clearly an attack on a Christian named Alexamenos by someone who wished to disparage the Christians and their name-sake. The real importance of the drawing centers on the question of why Christ should have the head of an ass. Recent scholars have felt that the graffito is connected with the alleged worship of an ass-headed deity by the Jews and Christians.<sup>33</sup>

The charge that the Jews, and ultimately the Christians, worshipped an ass originated, according to Tertullian (Apol. 16), with Tacitus (Hist. V, 3). Supposedly there was an image of the ass in the Temple of Jerusalem, to commemorate a legendary miracle in the desert when the Israelites, dying of thirst during the Exodus, were led to water by some wild asses. This statue is alluded to by Apion (Contra Ap. II, 7, 9) and by Damocritus (FGH IV, 377), who say that Antiochus Epiphanes found a golden ass in the Temple.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>W. Déonna, "Laus Asini," Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire XXXIV (1956) and L. Vischer, "Le Pretendu Culte de l'Âne," RHR CXXIX (1951).

<sup>34</sup>A sidelight on the ass in the Temple is

Epiphanius asserts that this thing, when revealed to the world by Zacharias, was the cause of his death (Ad Haer. XXVI, 10, PG 41, 345-348). This story is also found in the apocryphal Birth of Mary.<sup>35</sup> Curiously, Exodus 34:20 does seem to accord preferential treatment to the firstborn of the ass. As a result of the miracle in the desert, the ass was thought to be always thirsty and expert at discovering water.<sup>36</sup> The latter ability has enjoyed mention as late as the novels of Zane Gray.

A pursuit of the ass through the desert of Graeco-Egyptian magic leads us closer to the charge Tertullian tries to refute, and from thence to the meaning of the graffito itself. Aside from the story of the ass in the Temple there was another source for the idea of the ass as the god of the Jews and later of the Christians. Etymology was in part responsible,

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given by Epiphanius, who said that the seventh archon, Sabaoth, the god of the Jews, had the form of an ass or of a pig, which is why the Jews do not eat pork. (Ad Haer. XXVI, PG 41, 345)

<sup>35</sup> See M. R. James, ed., The Apocryphal New Testament (Oxford, 1924), pp. 19-24.

<sup>36</sup> Diod. Sic., XXXIV and Albertus Magnus, De Anim., XXII, 2, 1, 83.

for there is evidence that the Coptic word for the ass,  $\overline{\text{EIO}}$ , and the word IAW, another form of Jehovah, were confused. For example, the magic name IAWOW appears as an anonymous gloss of the sign of the ass in a demotic magic papyrus.<sup>37</sup> Seth, the ass-headed god, and the god of the Jews were also linked etymologically in magical documents, as in the great papyrus at Paris where IOBΘ / XOCEΘ is joined with IAW and CABAOΘ (PGM I, 3261). The fact that Seth is joined with names of power in magical rather than Gnostic documents tends further to define the precedents for the graffito.

Iconographically Seth could easily have been taken over in the Palatine wall-drawing, as he was traditionally depicted--both in magical papyri (Fig. 51) and in gems (Fig. 52)--as standing, and with the head of an ass.

So far we have discussed the ass-headed Seth figure only in relation to the Jews, but an ass-headed Christ was sufficiently well known to give point to

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<sup>37</sup> F. Griffith and H. Thompson, eds., The Demotic Magical Papyrus of London and Leyden (London, 1904-09), 26, 14.

the insult tendered to Alexamenos. Tertullian mentions that a painting had recently appeared at Rome, showing a man with the ears of an ass, a hoof on one foot, wearing a toga and carrying a book, with the inscription, "The God of the Christians ONOKOIHTC," i.e. Donkey Priest (Apol. 16). This painting seems to have been copied on an antique gem (Fig. 53), where the animal gives instruction to two women. The adversaries of the early Christians were not slow to point out that the religion attracted many women converts. Moreover, it may even be possible that there was some foundation, if not for the worship of the ass-headed man by the Christians, at least for the employment of such a figure for magical purposes. For it should not be forgotten that both Seth and Christ were thought to have great power over the lower world, and to the syncretistic thinking of the later Empire, the more gods at one's command the better.<sup>38</sup> The

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<sup>38</sup> It may not be out of place here to mention a contested reading in the text of a magical papyrus. Leyden 384 (PGM XII, 138-40) contains this fragment: "I exorcise you and your power, great god Seth, and the hour in which you were born, O great god, [giver of oracles or replies: xp̄z / ~~ut~~ icovt̄ ], the present god, the 365 names of the great god." "Giver of oracles" is a conjecture by Preisendanz; the text apparently reads ϣ, which may be an abbreviation or a

magical significance of the ass-headed Christ is more clearly revealed in a coin depicting Alexander the Great (Fig. 54). The reverse shows an ass and her colt with the inscription, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God." The animals may be connected in some way with the passage from Exodus referred to above. In an attack on those Christians who tried to augment the power of the cross with magical devices of various sorts, John Chrysostom refers to the custom of wearing coins of Alexander the Great on the head and toes for good luck (Ad Illum. Catec. II, PG 49, 240). Unfortunately he does not explain the significance of these coins.

Besides the Palatine graffito, there exists, to my knowledge, one other early crucifixion scene which is not on a gem. In this instance also Christ takes on pagan features. It is an amulet found in Montagnana, Italy, showing an ass-headed Christ hanging from a cross, while an ape looks up in a parody of the Disciples (Fig. 55).

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monogram for Christ. A. Dieterich, "Papyrus Magica Musei Lugdunensis Batavi," Jahrb. fur Klass. Phil. Suppl. XVI (1888), reads xpictov. For Christ's association with the names of the 365 archons, see Epiphanius, Ad Haer. XXVI, 9, PG 41, 345.

L. Vischer is of the opinion that the piece is Gnostic in origin. He observes that in the Gnostic Physiologus of the 2nd century A.D. both the ass and the ape are associated with the power of the devil and the demiurge, and the ass is connected with the month of March. To the Egyptians, March 25th was the day when Seth's power for evil was at its greatest. According to Epiphanius the devil was the son of the seventh archon, Sabaoth, who as we have seen was associated with the ass-headed god in magical texts (Ad Haer. XL, 5, PG 41, 684). Thus Vischer thinks that the ass-headed person is the devil or the demiurge who has been conquered by the cross, and the ape below is the humiliated devil.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps the imitative power of the demiurge is parodied by the ape and his well known imitative faculties.

The Montagnana amulet and the Palatine graffito provide strong evidence for a tradition of quite un-Christian crucifixion scenes in the late Empire. Indeed, of the crucifixions known to me which can be dated before the 5th century A.D.--the Orpheus gem,

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<sup>39</sup>L. Vischer, pp. 17-28.



the Palatine graffito, the Montagnana amulet, the Gaza, the Constanza and the Rome gems, only the last two are free from Gnostic or magical elements.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, the number of examples which connect Christ with an ass--a connection, after all, far more scandalous than the association of Orpheus with Christ, indicates that such a connection was widely current and suggests that perhaps the Orpheus gem in the Berlin Museum is the only surviving example of a class of relatively popular intagli.

More traditional crucifixion scenes also shed light on the Berlin gem. Our gem is the only one of the various representations of the crucifixion before

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<sup>40</sup>There is evidence that the cross in itself was thought to have magical and apotropaic powers. An amulet of the 6th century published by G. Schlumberger, "Quelques Monuments Byzantines Inédits," Byzantinische Zeitschrift (1893), p. 188, is quite conventionally Christian except for the curious inscription, "Cross, protect Abamoun." Belief in the efficacy of the cross came down through the Middle Ages into our own time. A Middle English charm in Glazier M.S. 39 tells the reader, "This crose. XV tymes metynis þetrew lenth of our Lorde Ihesu Criste. And þat day that þou lokes on it er beris it a-pone the, that day sall no wekid sprete haue pouer to hurte þe." Text in C. F. Buhler, "Prayers and Charms in Certain Middle English Scrolls," Speculum XXXIX (1964), 275. In the Dracula movies of the 1930's and '40's the vampire invariably recoils at the sight of a silver crucifix brandished by the hero.

the 6th century which shows the crucified figure alone. The Gaza, Constanza and Rome gems show him either with worshippers or with the twelve apostles. In these representations Christ is twice the size of the spectators, to indicate his power; except for the Gaza gem, he is rigidly frontal, as he is in all of the extant antique and early medieval crucifixions--the St. Sabina gate carving (Fig. 56), the British Museum ivory (Fig. 57), the St. Maria Antigua fresco (Fig. 58), the Utrecht Psalter (Fig. 59), and the Lateran Reliquary (Fig. 60).

The only gem which does show similarities in the treatment of Christ-Orpheus' position on the cross is the Gaza gem--the one furthest from being an orthodox Christian scene. It does not present the apostles, six on either side of the cross, as do several early crucifixions, or the two thieves, as do the Abamoun amulet (Fig. 61), St. Sabina gate, and illustrations of the Rabula Gospels. Another important difference is that the Gaza gem contains magical inscriptions which are in no way related to the orthodox Christian crucifixion. Finally, the attitude of the persons on the Gaza gem, coupled with the inscriptions, suggests that they seek the aid of the nimbed figure or worship

its power. On the other hand, the attitude of this figure, arms slightly bent from the body's weight, legs bent and turned to the left as in the Orpheus gem, shows that the gem was engraved with a real cross in mind. Since the main interest of both the Gaza and the Orpheus gems lay in their magical powers, and since these powers were the reason their owners wore them, there was no need, as in more orthodox scenes, to overlook or disguise the fact that crucifixion was an ignominious death reserved for slaves and not to be associated with the son of God. What, then, can we conclude from the dissimilarity of composition and attitude between the Berlin gem and the rest of the early crucifixion scenes? Simply that the Orpheus gem is not meant to be an historical or realistic crucifixion, either of Christ or of "Orpheus-Bacchus," but rather, its importance lies in the realm of syncretistic magic.

The Stars and Crescent. Above the cross on the Berlin gem are engraved seven stars and a crescent, a motif whose widespread use in funerary art of the Roman period suggests something more about the amulet's purpose and thereby about Orpheus' significance for the wearer.

The iconography of this motif probably has its origins in ancient Syrian and North African religious thought and even earlier in Egyptian sun worship. The most primitive examples of the motif in both pagan and Christian funerary art consist of simple ornamentation of tombs or stelae with solar discs and stars (Fig. 62).<sup>41</sup> From these developed more narrative treatments of the dead person's relation to the heavens. A Latin stele from Dura-Europos shows the dead man outstretched with the sun figured prominently above him (Fig. 63).<sup>42</sup> The sun often served as a synecdoche for the heavens in the funerary and religious art of the Hellenistic and Roman periods.<sup>43</sup> On a stone found in Rome we learn that the occupant of the tomb was a  $\gamma \lambda \iota \sigma \pi \alpha \iota \varsigma$ , a child of the sun. Yet that this inscription was Christian in

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<sup>41</sup> See the Christian sarcophagi reproduced in J. Toutain, "Les Symboles Astraux sur les Monuments Funéraires de l'Afrique du Nord," Revue des Etudes Anciennes XIII (1911). One is from Altava in Caesarea, the other from Ain Beida.

<sup>42</sup> The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Preliminary Report of the Sixth Season (New Haven, 1936), pl. XXXII.

<sup>43</sup> See G. Michailidès, to whose article, "Vestiges du Culte Solaire parmi les Chrétiens d'Égypte," Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte XIV (1950), I am indebted for much of my information on solar religion in this period.

origin can be established by the presence on it of a lamb flanked by two fish (CIG IV, 9727). Sometimes the sun is associated with immortality by a quirk of early Christian etymology--the prophet Elijah ( <sup>c'</sup> ~~H~~ <sup>105</sup> ), who did not die, was linked with the sun ( <sup>c'</sup> ~~H~~ <sup>105</sup> ), as in the cemetery of Peter and Marcellinus where a nimbed sun, representing the prophet, guides a chariot to the heavens.<sup>44</sup> As H. Seyrig has remarked in his discussion of astral symbolism in the eastern Empire,

in a period when the belief in a supreme being had infiltrated all religions--a being whose rule embraced the entire universe--this divinity was often imagined under an astral aspect. The stars and the planets, especially the sun and the moon, passed for aspects of destiny.<sup>45</sup>

This destiny was most often a literal journey of the soul to the stars. A 2nd century A.D. funerary relief from Albano, now in the National Museum at Copenhagen (Fig. 64), pictures a child's soul having reached heaven

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<sup>44</sup>See A. B. Cook, Zeus (Cambridge, 1914-40) I, 178 ff.

<sup>45</sup>Henri Seyrig, "Heliopolitana," Bull. du Musée de Beyrouth I (1937), p. 93, my trans. See also F. Cu-mont, "Théologie Solaire du Paganisme," Acad. des In-scriptions II, 2 (1913).

by a bust of the child resting in the crescent of the moon and surrounded by seven stars.

The doctrine of the soul's home in the heavens is at least as old as Pythagoras, whom his biographer Iamblichus represents as having held that the sun and moon were actually the Isles of the Blessed (Vit. Pythaq. 18, 2). Pythagoras was also supposed to have said that the space between the earth and the moon was filled with souls (Diog. Laert., Vit. Pythaq. VIII, 32). Pliny explained the soul's affinity for the heavens thus: "animasque nostras partem esse caeli" (HN II, 26, 95). The true lover, according to Plutarch, "when he has reached the other world," enjoys himself in the company of the god of love "until it is time for him to go again to the meadows of the moon . . . and fall asleep before he begins another existence in this world" (Amat. 20). Plutarch thought the soul was a light-giving entity like the stars of its original home. As it descended into matter it acquired earthly impurities--rather like dirt on a lightbulb--which obscured its luminosity. He relates how a certain Timarchus, wishing to learn about the voice which spoke to Socrates, descended into an oracular crypt where

he went into a trance and his soul escaped through his skull. Pleased at its freedom, it ascended through the spheres, passed through the realm of fire and lost sight of earth. Finally it looked down and saw only a chaotic darkness from which came anguished cries. A daemon tells the soul of Timarchus that the sounds come from earth, which is Hades, and that the Styx is a path from the earth to the heavens. Some souls who have escaped the cycle of birth, decay and death go to the moon, where the immutable realm begins. Other souls are sent back to earth for reincarnation. The dim stars which the soul of Timarchus sees are actually those souls which still contain earthly impurities, while the brightest stars are the souls of those men who have freed themselves from earthly concerns and who have gained understanding (De Gen. Soc. 22-23).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Certain neo-Platonic writers interpreted the underworld myths of Homer and Virgil to show that the rivers which circled Hades in old legend were actually the spheres which encircled the earth, and that the souls supposed to inhabit different parts of Hades actually inhabited different zones above the earth. Here is how Proclus explained the rivers:

Indeed the places of judgement below the earth and in Hades and those rivers of which both Homer and Plato spoke to us should not be supposed to be empty fantasies and quackish myths. But just as for those souls going into heaven

Patristic references to astral translation, while less common, show the idea's importance in early Christianity. For St. Augustine, the souls of evil men must continue the round of reincarnation alluded to by Plutarch, but souls of good men "go to the highest part of the heavens, to rest there in stars and be visible in their lights" (Sermo CCLX, 4, PL 38, 1132). Gregory regards this idea in a more metaphoric sense, but still gives credence to it.

What is meant by the stars if not the souls of those who lived a singularly good life? Who in the company of depraved men stood out by their great virtues, just as stars shine in the gloom of night" (Moral. in Job XVII, 16, PL 76, 21).

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there are many ranks and destinies marked out, so it is necessary to think that for those needing punishment and purification rivers arise from below the earth, being subtle emanations of the earth above, which are called rivers and streams. (In Rem. 383, Kroll I, 121-22)

Lydus reports that the Egyptian Hermes said that those souls who have transgressed the rules of piety, when they are delivered from the body, are given over to the gods and are borne through the air and slung across the zones of fire and hail which the poets call Pyriphlegathon and Tartarus. (De Mens. IV, 149, Wuensch, p. 167)

Such ideas lie behind the pagan epitaph for a ten-year-old boy who had read Homer and Pythagoras during a happy childhood and now goes to Hades through the stars (Anth. Lat. 434, Baecheler).



The ascent of the soul was of particular interest to writers on white magic. Hermes Trismagistus, in the Corpus Hermeticum, presents this explanation of the ascent. At death the soul

mounts upward through the structure of the heavens. And to the first zone of heaven he gives up the force which works increase and that which works decrease; to the second zone, the machinations of evil cunning . . . and thereupon, having been stripped of all that was wrought upon him by the structure of the heavens, he ascends to the substance of the eighth sphere, being now possessed of his own proper power. And he sings, together with those who dwell there, hymning the Father . . . and thereafter, each in his turn, they mount upward to the Father . . . [and] enter into God. (tr. Walter Scott, I, 25, 111)

Similar accounts could be found in eastern, and particularly Mithraic, religion as well. In the mysteries of Mithras, Celsus was supposed to have said, the passage of the soul through the heavens was represented as follows:

there is a ladder with lofty gates, and on top of it an eighth gate. The first gate consists of lead, the second of tin . . . . the first gate they assign to Saturn . . . the second to Venus . . . (Contra Celsum VI, 22, ANF, p. 360).

In Judaeo-Gnostic and magical lore the seven stars stand for the archons or presiding deities of

of the planets. Origen speaks of a diagram belonging to the Gnostic Ophites which was a sort of map for the soul's progress after death. The soul must pass through the realm of each of the seven planetary archons; to avoid being trapped in any particular realm it must offer the archon certain magical images or speak certain magical words. It says to Sabaoth, for example, whom we have met before in magical contexts, "O archon of the fifth realm, mighty Sabaoth . . . admit me . . . (literally) seeing the unfailing symbol of your art, an image of your stamp" (Contra Celsum VI, 31, PG 11, 1344). A somewhat similar passage occurs in the Gospel of Philip. "The Lord revealed unto me what the soul must say as it goeth up unto heaven, and how it must answer each of the powers above."<sup>47</sup>

Like the so-called "Orphic" gold plates from southern Italy which gave directions about the topography of Hades to the dead man and identified him to the ruling deities,<sup>48</sup> the Orpheus gem may have been designed to propitiate malignant archons or otherwise

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<sup>47</sup> Apocryphal New Testament, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> The best discussion of these plates is in Guthrie, p. 181 ff.

aid the soul in its journey to the stars. As we may recall from the plan of the soul's ascent outlined by Hermes Trismagistus in the Corpus Hermeticum, each of these archons--who were partly material, and so malignant, in the Gnostic and magical systems of antiquity--had power over a certain part of the soul. The chart of which Origen speaks sounds suspiciously like a magical papyrus, and the archons, Sabaoth, IAW, Ildabaoth, and so forth, are names of power found on magical amulets. The system of Origen's chart, of course, is nothing but apotropaic astrology. The archons, in plainer language, are those planets and constellations thought to hold power over the various parts of the man in apotropaic and medical astrology. Such a connection between the heavens and the human body may be seen in a Greek medical manuscript illustration of the Byzantine period (Fig. 65).

A version of Origen's chart exists on a gem from the Cabinet of Florence (Fig. 66).<sup>49</sup> A. Delatte has interpreted the inscriptions around the seven stars as the names of the seven archons in a magical

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<sup>49</sup>Published by P. Maffei, Gemme Antichi (Rome, 1707-1709), II, x, 23.

cosmology,<sup>50</sup> and thinks that the gem may represent the soul descending into generation and arriving at the Lion--that constellation representing a grade of initiation in the solar theology of the period (p. 19).<sup>51</sup>

A votive relief of Selene in the British Museum (Fig. 67) shows the goddess surrounded by the seven stars and signs of the zodiac; the piece, of Graeco-Roman make, indicates that the goddess has power over the astral bodies--perhaps as Christ-Orpheus has power over the stars<sup>52</sup>--and the relief is inscribed with the names of the more familiar of the seven archons, as well as of some that sound a bit like the names on

<sup>50</sup> A. Delatte, "Étude sur la Magie Gréque," Musée Belge: Revue de Philologie Classique XVIII (1914), p. 14.

<sup>51</sup> In Porphyry, De Ant. Nymph. 13, bees are the souls of the  $\nu\upsilon\omicron\tau\lambda$  at the end of their voyage through the planetary spheres, an idea which may explain the bee in the mouth of the lion.

<sup>52</sup> An extensive hand list of monuments which show Christ crucified or enthroned between the sun and moon has been compiled by Waldemar Déonna, "Les Crucifixes de la Vallée de Saas . . . Sol et Luna, Histoire d'un Thème Iconographique," RHR CXXXIII (1947). For further discussion of the sun and moon as symbols for eternity in east Christian art, see A. Drioton, Bull. de la Soc. d'Archéologie Copte X (1944).

the Florence lion gem: IAIA, ØPAINØIPI, KANWØPA,  
 ΛUKUCUNTA, ΛWΛ EKAKICTH, CABAWØ, ABWØEPCAC.<sup>53</sup>

The seven stars are not limited to pagan use, but recur in many Christian contexts to indicate the all-inclusive power of God. In Revelation 1:4 John sends grace to the churches in Asia "from him which is, and which was, and which is to come and from the seven spirits which are before his throne." This description reminds one of the description of Jehovah in Orpheus' Palinode, who sat on a golden throne in the heavens. Here the seven spirits are the archons or angels of the planets. In the famous description of "one like unto the Son of man" we learn that he had "in his right hand seven stars . . . and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength" (1:17), and he said to John, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and death" (1:18). A Christian lamp of the third century from Rome (Fig. 68) shows the Good Shepherd bearing the sheep--that

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<sup>53</sup> The inscriptions on the Selene relief are given by A. H. Smith, A Catalogue of Sculptures . . . in the British Museum (London, 1904) III, 2162.

is, the soul--to the seven stars just visible above his head.

Orpheus was, as we have seen, associated with a very similar function after death, and the seven stars pictured above him on the Berlin amulet may well allude directly to this function. Certainly the conjunction of his name with that of Bacchus and with the crucifixion of Christ is further evidence that the gem, like the Palatine graffito and the Montagnana amulet, is not designed to commemorate the crucifixion of Christ. The Berlin gem, along with many other primarily magical objects of this period, is a relic of the religious syncretism of the late Empire. The man who attaches a St. Christopher medal to the dashboard of his car is, in effect, calling upon the magical power of the saint to aid travelers in this world by the mere possession of his image. The owner of the St. Christopher medal, using the pagan wish-magic of antiquity together with the name and image of a Christian saint, is employing the same kind of device, for much the same purpose, as the owner of the Christ-Orpheus amulet.

## Orpheus in Sculpture

Next to mosaic pavements, Orpheus is most frequently encountered in sculpture and reliefs. There are some twenty-seven pieces extant which depict Orpheus, ranging in date from the 1st to the 6th centuries A. D.; most were made during the 3rd and 4th centuries. The carving is of varying quality, much of it rather poor, and the pieces seem mainly to have come from the eastern and northeastern provinces of the Empire.

It is difficult to determine, in most cases, whether the pieces are pagan or Christian in conception. Some clearly are Christian, such as a sarcophagus fragment from Cacaens (Fig. 69) where the variety of animals of the more traditional Orpheus scenes has been reduced to two: sheep or cows, which create a pastoral atmosphere and connect this Orpheus with the Good Shepherd. Other reliefs, those of Lauriacum and Intercissa (Figs. 70, 71) are more traditional and more ambiguous. Since many of these carvings were made for Roman soldiers--who were not noted for a rapid conversion to Christianity--the majority of them were probably pagan in conception, unless we

can point to specifically Christian details of their iconography.<sup>54</sup>

That Orpheus sculptures of the 3rd, 4th, and later centuries A. D. came out of more than a decorative tradition we know from the many pieces which plainly are funerary monuments. Out of twenty-four larger carvings, fifteen are from chapels, mausoleums, sarcophagi, and simple graves; four may have been funerary in origin; the remainder give no indication that they are not from funerary settings. The intention of these pieces was probably to express hope of immortality or celestial happiness for the dead person--an intention borne out by the scenes depicted on other monuments among which they were found. Other such works also portray mythological subjects--Heracles and Alcestis, for example--dealing with resurrection and immortality.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>G. G. King, "Reliefs at Budapest," AJA XXXVII (1933), points out that the graves at Intercissa were those of Roman legionaries who bore their mystery religions with them. p. 64 ff. Two Orpheus stelae come from Intercissa, one from Pettau, Yugoslavia, and one from Lauriacum, all military sites.

<sup>55</sup>Such themes predominate in the handlist given by King, op. cit. Parallel reliefs of Orpheus and Eurydice, Heracles, and Alcestis occur in the mausoleum of



These are themes which one might well expect to see treated in underworld scenes, the triumphant Orpheus winning Pluto by his song or leading Eurydice towards the upper world. Yet in all but two examples Orpheus is shown playing to the animals above ground.<sup>56</sup> Only when we realize the associations attached to Orpheus as animal charmer in the Roman period can we understand how funerary representations of him among the animals may, in certain ways, be more to the point.

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D. Apuleius Maximus Rideus at El-Amrouni in North Africa. See Philippe Berger "Le Mausolée d'El-Amrouni" RA XXVI (1895).

<sup>56</sup>Three funerary pieces allude, wholly or in part to the underworld rather than to the animal legend. In the stele from Intercissa, the artist has shown Orpheus in triumph, leading Eurydice through the door of Hades. The mausoleum at El-Amrouni shows two reliefs. In one, he sits below a tree, an eagle, a griffin, a bear and other animals listen to his song. The other relief depicts Ixion on his wheel, Charon and his bark, a three-headed Cerberus. A hand appears in a door way, pointing at a cowed Eurydice who is being led away by Orpheus. This relief and that of Intercissa give a happy ending to the legend. On the great stele in the market place at Pettau, Yugoslavia (Fig. 72) Orpheus plays to the animals in the upper register, some of whom walk about in a frame, reminiscent of the Orpheus mosaics. Below in the damaged lower register, he plays before the gods of the underworld and Hermes or Heracles stands with Eurydice.

Hades, was, after all, connected with the most ancient and the most pessimistic view of the afterlife: "Oblivio omnium rerum mors" (CIL 12, 4745). As was suggested earlier, post-Stoic thought was much concerned to translate the old infernal regions to the heavens and to consider the nature of the soul and the afterlife in more sophisticated terms. In general, with the Pythagoreans, Stoics, and neo-Platonists, there was a shift in interest from the cthonic Hades of Homer to a celestial home for the soul. Although the story of how Orpheus by his beautiful song persuaded the underworld deities to release his wife and to allow them both to return to the light may seem initially more appropriate to a funerary context, it has, I think, certain flaws. First and most obvious, it is a descensus: a voyage to the bowels of the earth rather than to the light. We should recall that even the descensus ad inferos in the 6th book of Virgil's Aeneid ended with the hero's vision of an ascent to the light by the souls of the righteous. Further, in most versions, Orpheus does not succeed in bringing his wife back to the world of the living.

The allegorical possibilities inherent in the story of the animal charming are much greater. It is easier, as the frequency of such interpretations illustrates, to interpret the animals as savage men, and, by extension, the irascible parts of the soul, while I can think of no such allegorical interpretation, in late antiquity, of Orpheus' persuasion of Pluto and Proserpine. They were what they were. In addition, the animal legend, with its stringed music, fit in well with the current Pythagorean theories about the nature of the heavens and the place of the soul in them.

In antiquity it was thought that the whirling of the celestial bodies produced a beautiful harmony. This music resulted, as Scipio Africanus learned during his dream vision, from the motions of the spheres, one within the other. The highest tones were made by the outermost, the lowest tones by the innermost sphere, that of the moon, which moves slowly. The moving spheres produced seven tones, and this number bound all things together (Som. Scip. VIII).<sup>57</sup> The soul was peculiarly

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<sup>57</sup>Plato, in the Republic, had said that on each planet sat a Siren who sang one note, and that all of the Sirens singing together produced the celestial music (116b). In a 1st-century A.D. ceiling mosaic for the temple of Bel-Jupiter at Palmyra, the goddesses of the seven planets are grouped around the central god in a

attracted to this music because it reminded the soul of its divine home before the descent into generation.

Philo wrote of it that

. . . the music which is perfected in heaven and is produced by the harmony of the movement of the stars . . . does not extend or reach as far as the Creator's earth . . . because of His providential care for the human race. For it rouses to madness those who hear it, and produces in the soul an indescribable and unrestrained pleasure . . .  
(Quaest. in Gen. III, 3)

The musical relation of the soul to the divine intelligence was the one constant which even a debased life could not destroy. As Macrobius expressed it,

Every soul in this world is allured by musical sounds, . . . not only those who are more refined in their habits, but all of the barbarous people as well . . . for the soul carried with it into the body a memory of the music which it knew in the sky, and is so captivated by its charm that there is no breast so cruel or savage as not to be gripped by the spell of such an appeal. This I believe was the origin of the [story] of Orpheus. (Comment. in Som. Scip., tr. W. H. Stahl, p. 195)

hexagon framed by the zodiac, in the corners of which are the celestial Sirens (K. A. Creswell, Early Muslim Architecture, Oxford, 1932, I, p. 138 ff., Fig. 87). The motif is given a Christian interpretation in the Church of San Marco, Venice, where, in a mosaic, the four evangelists support the heavenly dome and the Sirens' Platonic song is replaced by this inscription: "Ecclesiae Christi/ vigiles sunt quattuor isti,/ quorum dulce melos/ sonat et movet unique caelos" (Reproductions and inscriptions in K. Lehmann, "The Dome of Heaven," Art Bulletin XXVII (1945)).

The instrument most capable of imitating the music of the spheres on earth was the seven-stringed lyre with which Orpheus had conquered Hell and charmed the animals, for it, of all the instruments, was the only one created according to the pattern of the universe itself. Moreover, the soul's relation to the universal intelligence was very like that of the lyre to the musician; God, as Clement and others had pointed out, was the divine musician. Thus a man wishing astral immortality could do no better than to associate himself with this instrument, for, as Cicero said, "men who know how to imitate the harmony of the spheres by the lyre open up a road for themselves to heaven" (Som. Scip. VIII).

According to Pythagoras the universe was made on the same principles which were later used in the construction of the lyre (Quintillian, Instit. I, 10, 12). There are two versions of this idea. The first, and probably the older, is the notion of the concordia discors of the four elements, as developed by Heraclitus. He saw the relation of air, earth, fire, and water to one another as similar to that of the archer's bow to its bowstring. Too much strain on the bow breaks

the string, too much stress on the string breaks the bow. Too much earth destroys air, too much water destroys fire, but if all four elements exist in equal struggle, the organic universe lives and emits an harmonious sound. The analogy in the case of the lyre is that the lyre strings must be tightened in perfect relation to each other or cacaphony will result.<sup>58</sup>

Sidonius Apollinaris refers to this version of Pythagorean harmony when he says, "He [Pythagoras] also calls by the name of harmony the arrangement of the four elements . . ." (Carm. XV). This doctrine of harmony was elaborated upon during the Middle Ages, and Athanasius Kircher referred to it in his work on the principles of music: "Orpheus constructed a lyre with four strings and arranged all of the tones according to steps in fourths (gradus diatessaron), of which the first cord, hypate, he assigned the earth; the second, parhypate, to water; the third, paranete, to air and the fourth, nete, to fire."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Fragment 251, Diels.

<sup>59</sup>Musurgia Universalis sive Ars Magna Consoni et Dissoni (Rome, 1650), Bk. X, p. 371. Kircher claims to have got this idea "Briennio teste," that is, from Manuel Bryennius, who may have been following a fragment

The second, and more common, version of the lyre's relation to the cosmos is based on the number seven. Theon Smyrnaeus wrote that "When Hermes was a boy he invented the lyre and, going into the heavens and passing the planets, he marvelled that from the movement of the planets came forth a harmony similar to that of the lyre which he himself had constructed" (Hiller, p. 142). Other writers, interested in the mystical possibilities of the number seven, elaborated on it. Philo said that the lyre has seven strings by analogy with the "heavenly choir of the seven planets who, in harmonious agreement, direct the fabrication of all musical instruments" (De Op. Mund., 126). Hippolytus, on the other hand, links the instrument with the Hexameron. The lyre

consists of seven strings, signifying . . .  
the entire harmony and construction of the  
world as it is melodiously constituted.

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of Varro. Bryennius, c. 1320, was a Byzantine musicologist who wrote a summary of Aristides Quintilianus and other early musical theorists, the De Harmonica, ed. Johannis Wallis, Opera Mathematica, Oxford, 1699 (see III, p. 361). Aristides had written that music comes about from changes in the order of the elements, and that the arrangement of tones is analogous to the arrangement of the cosmos: "Wise men say that the universe is a kind of lyre struck by the plectrum of God." (De Musica, III, 25)

For in six days the world was made, and  
[the Creator] rested on the seventh  
(Ref. IV, 48, ANF, p. 43).

Varro is more metaphoric yet: "The Sun follows his perennial course, tempering with a sure harmony the noble lyre of the gods," i.e. the seven planets (Petronii Satirae, Frag. 351, Buecheler).

Because of the perfect number of its strings, its effect on the reason, and its relation to the macrocosm, the seven-stringed lyre was connected with the soul as well. Simmias said that the soul has the same relation to the body as harmony has to the lyre (Phaedo 85E). And Aristides Quintilianus explained that

those who honor the pure regions and aether reject all wind instruments as soiling the soul and dragging it downward towards material things and apply themselves only to the lyre and cithera because they are the purest instruments and with them they accomplished their religious songs and hymns. (De Mus., II, xix, p. 92)

A curious tessera from Palmyra (Fig. 73) connects the lyre with the stars. The piece shows Apollo-Nebo playing his lyre before a star and may help to explain a little-known passage from the Syrian apologist, Melito of Sardis, who lived about 200 A. D.



air

What should I write to you about the god Nebo in Mabug? For see that all the priests in Mabug know him to be a copy of the Thracian wizard Orpheus.<sup>60</sup>

The myth of Apollo and Marsyas was often interpreted as the victory of the soul over the base appetites of the body, and hence of the lyre over the flute, the celestial over the mortal life. Aristides gives this view of the story.

Pythagoras counselled his disciples when they have heard flute songs to purify themselves of a sound filled with fogs of wind, but on the other hand, with respect to the lyre, to welcome these sounds of good omen as a way of purifying themselves of the irrational passions of the soul. For the flute flatters that which rules the lower part of the soul and the lyre is dear and agreeable to that which watches on the reasonable part. (De Mus. II, xix, p. 91)

According to Cumont, the sounds of the lyre were held by the Romans to purify the man, rid him of material concerns

and provoke in him such an ecstasy that the divine love, by which he is seized, leads him to the etherial spheres, and this ecstasy gives him a foretaste of

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<sup>60</sup> The Palmyran tessera was published by H. Ingeholt et al., Recueil des Tessères de Palmyra (Paris, 1955), pl. XLIX, 302. The passage from Melito occurs in the Corpus Apologetarum Christianorum, ed. J. Otto (Jena, 1882), p. 426.

what he will experience when his soul,<sup>61</sup>  
freed from matter, flies to the stars.

Because of this association of the lyre with the soul and with immortality, Clement of Alexandria could suggest to new Christians that among their seals should be, not portraits of the pagan divinities, but the anchor, the ship running before a fair wind, the fish, and the lyre (Paed. III, 2).

There is evidence that Orpheus, the lyre, and the stars were joined in the literature as well as in the art of antiquity. In a gloss of Servius on Aeneid, VI, 119, found in B. N. Lat. 7930 there is a reference to a lost work ascribed to Orpheus and called Lyra. The scholium speaks of how "Orpheus according to the fable descended to Hell for the recalling (revocandam) of his wife's soul." Apparently the author does not put much faith in the idea of Eurydice's bodily resurrection. He says that when Virgil writes "arcessare" he means "evocare," so apparently Orpheus was thought to have a particular power in raising the spirits of the dead. He goes on,

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<sup>61</sup>Franz Cumont, Recherches sur le Symbolisme Funéraire des Romains (Paris, 1942), p. 18. My trans.

certain people say that the lyre of Orpheus had seven strings and heaven has seven zones, from whence a theological explanation is given. Varro, however, says that a book of Orpheus on the summoning of the soul is called Lyra, and it is denied that the soul can ascend without a lyre.<sup>62</sup>

A. D. Nock suggests that this Lyra may have been a neo-Pythagorean work for invoking the souls of the dead (CR, 1927, p. 170). Indeed, if anyone would have known a curious custom concerning Orpheus, it would have been Varro, as we saw in connection with the semi-dramatic treatment of Orpheus in Laurentum (Introduction, n. 20). This scholium indicates then that both in Varro's and in Servius' time Orpheus' lyre was associated with 1) the celestial afterlife, 2) the means of gaining such a life, and 3) the arrangement of the heavens themselves.<sup>63</sup> A picture

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<sup>62</sup>On VI, 645, Servius gives a similar statement about the lyre and the planets. Orpheus ". . . primus etiam deprehendit harmoniam, id est circulorum mundanorum sonum, quos novem esse novimus. e quibus summus, quem anaston dicunt sono caret, item ultimus, qui terrenus est. Reliqui septem sunt, quorum sonum deprehendit Orpheus, unde uti septem fingitur chordis." (ed. Thilo and Hagen, pp. 89-90)

<sup>63</sup>It is interesting that Orpheus and the Sibyl are the only two figures from pagan mythology admitted in the Coptic funeral chapel frescoes at Bawît.

of Orpheus playing his lyre to the animals could allude to the soul's place in the heavens just as well as, perhaps even better than, a representation of Orpheus in the underworld.

Thus the lyre of Orpheus conquered Hell, and as Manilius, the Roman astronomer, says of the constellation Lyra, "if once the rocks and woods followed it in cadence, now it leads the stars, and the spheres, revolving, follow it" (Astron. I, 323 ff.).

Two groups of late antique sculpture embody these eschatological ideas, in greater or lesser degree. The first of these is a collection of five sculptures very similar in style. They all show, or once showed, Orpheus and the animals surrounded by an arbor of living trees. The second group is a collection of sarcophagi and sarcophagi fragments which show Orpheus in the position of Mithras the bull-slayer. Sculptures belonging to the arbor group may have been designed for use in burial places; those belonging to the Mithras taurocton $\alpha$ s group certainly were.

The arbor group. These pieces, the first, the Tibicini Monument in the Museo Communale (Fig. 74),

the second, in the Ottoman Museum in Istamboul (Fig. 75), the third, in the Athens Museum (Fig. 76), the fourth, from Sabratha, in Tripoli (Fig. 77), and the fifth, recently discovered at Byblos<sup>64</sup> (fig. 78), seem to have been designed to stand on bases. Though they are nominally three-dimensional, judging from the style of the four complete pieces, they suggest transpositions from flat sarcophagus reliefs, or, more likely, from frontal mosaics of the 4th or 5th centuries A.D. as they are all quite frontal in aspect. It seems likely that all but the more Hellenic Tibicini piece were made in the same workshop or imitated from a common pattern book.<sup>65</sup> The fact that they seem based on a text from Philostratus which described Orpheus in the arbor of living trees (Imaq. 6), in addition to their lack of any Christianizing elements, suggests that they were pagan productions.

In view of the number of Orpheus scenes which have been linked to tombs, graves, and funeral chapels,

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<sup>64</sup>Published by J. Lauffray, Bull. du Musée de Beyrouth IV (1940).

<sup>65</sup>On this question see G. Mendel, Catalogue des Sculptures des Musées Ottoman (Constantinople, 1914) II, 420-423 and W. Lowrie AJA V (1901) pp. 52-3.



it seems likely that these pieces were designed to be placed in burial shrines rather than to serve merely a decorative function. C. Picard believes that the sculptures were acroteria to ornament the tops of pedestals around pagan fountains. Because the Byblos sculpture was broken into so many pieces when it was found in front of the wall of the Nymphaeum at Byblos, Picard thinks it must have fallen from a great height and thus served as a crown piece for the vault. Faced with the problem of explaining why the piece would have been associated with the Nymphaeum in the first place, he points to the epigram by Martial mentioned earlier, in which the poet spoke of an Orpheus sculpture in a Roman reservoir. While the eagle present in three of the arbor sculptures is also present in Martial's poem, this bird, as I have shown, had specific eschatological associations during the late Empire and is found with Orpheus in a number of funerary contexts. The question of the arbor group's destination cannot really be resolved, however, since so little is known about the origins of these sculptures.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>For the argument in favor of fountains, see C. Picard "Sur l'Orphée de la Fontaine Monumentale au



The arbor group definitely seems related to the Orpheus mosaics which were made in the 4th, 5th and later centuries A.D. In the Byblos, Athens, Istanbul and Sabratha statues, there is the same division into upper and lower registers of animals which we noted in the Saragossa and Jerusalem mosaic pavements. In the Athens carving, the animals surrounding Orpheus are arranged in parallel registers, and, except for the sculpture from Sabratha, the lyres when present are displaced to the side. The arbor of trees surrounding the musician suggests the late mosaics of Blanzky and of Volubilis, North Africa (Fig. 79) where Orpheus was enclosed by foliage.

Orpheus in the tauroctonos position of Mithras. In a group of Italian sarcophagi Orpheus has taken on the pose of Mithras the Bull Slayer. While this conflation of two divinities would be curious by itself, it is the more so since these sarcophagi seem definitely Christian in conception and the artists appear to have been representing

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Byblos" Miscellanea G. de Jerphanion (Rome, 1947) p. 270 ff, and "Lacus Orphei" REL XXV (1947) p. 82 ff, by the same author. J. Strzygowski, Rom. Quart. IV (1890) p. 166, has argued for their manufacture as funerary statues.

Christ the Good Shepherd by the same figure. They gave him the sheep of the Good Shepherd, the lyre and costume of Orpheus, and the stance of Mithras. All of these pieces are so close in style as to suggest that they were made in the same workshop and that they may have imitated a common original. Of these sarcophagi, one is from the Baths of Titus and Trajan (Fig. 80), one from Porto Torres in Sardinia (Fig. 81), and one from Ostia (Fig. 86), while two additional fragments have been reconstructed by Wilpert (Figs. 83, 4). In each instance Orpheus assumes what I shall call the tauroctonos position.

This position is the traditional pose of the god Mithras as he is portrayed in the symbolic sacrifice of the bull, whose blood was necessary for the cyclical regeneration of the earth as well as for the initiatory rites of those entering the god's cult.<sup>67</sup> Mithras assumes this position, for example, in a sculpture now at the Vatican Museum (Fig. 85). He wears a Phrygian bonnet and Persian trousers, and

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<sup>67</sup>For the ceremony of the taurobolium in the Mithraic system see the graphic description of Prudentius, Perist. X, 1010 ff.

supports himself on his left knee.<sup>68</sup>

Compare this statue with the sarcophagus found at Porto Torres. Orpheus adopts a position almost identical with that of Mithras, but the bull has become the Christian sheep or ram; the dagger has become the plectrum of the lyre; where the left hand of Mithras had wrenched back the bull's muzzle, Orpheus steadies with his left hand the lyre on the altar. Moreover, Orpheus wears the same general costume as Mithras and certain other details of the composition are similar. In a bas-relief of Mithras in the Archeological Museum at Florence (Fig. 86) we see his traditional corax or raven perched on the god's outflying cape. In the sarcophagus relief of Porto Torres, Orpheus, his head turned back, watches the eagle in the tree behind him; other birds sit lower on the tree and on his lyre. The poses are practically identical, the only real difference being in the position of Orpheus' left leg. Mithras' knee

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<sup>68</sup> For plates and discussion see Fritz Saxl, Mithras (Berlin, 1931). For a handlist of monuments see F. Cumont, "Monuments Figurés Relatifs au Culte de Mithra," RA (1892). On the fixity of Mithras' iconography see A. D. Nock, "The Genius of Mithraism," JRS XXVII (1937), 112-113.

rests firmly on the bull's back, while Orpheus, with no bull, only a small sheep or ram, rests his foot on a projection of the altar. If the left leg seems a bit unsupported it is only that the whole pose more properly belongs to Mithras.

Certain similarities between the solar theology of Mithras, the eschatological ideas associated with Orpheus, and the soul-bearing functions of the Christian Good Shepherd may have given the artisans the license to conflate these three persons. Certainly the early Fathers felt the purity of their new religion to be threatened by Mithraism, and we have already seen the way in which they incorporated Orpheus into their apologetic system.

Christ, Orpheus and Mithras were all associated with the sun, so that a donor could erect an altar to "The great Helios, incomparable Mithras and to the other gods who dwell with them."<sup>69</sup> In the solar theology of Mithraism, the god was a psychopompos

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<sup>69</sup>Greek text in G. Patriarcha, "Tre Iscrizioni Relative al Culto di Mitra," Bull. della Comm. Arch. Comunale LX (1932), 3 ff. Marthe Collinet-Guérin, Histoire du Nimbe (Paris, 1961), mentions some Bactrian coins on which Mithras wears a solar nimbus (p. 178). See also the famous relief of Antiochus from Commagene, depicting Apollo-Mithras-Helios-Hermes (Saxl, Mithras, p. 3, pl. I, 5).

who bore the souls of the initiated to the sun. So Julian, in the Caesars, 336 C, describes the god's function:

"As for thee," Hermes said to me, "I have granted thee the knowledge of thy father Mithras. Do thou keep his commandments, and thus receive for thyself a cable and sure anchorage throughout thy life, and when thou must depart from the world thou canst with good hope adopt him as thy guardian god."

Orpheus was connected with the sun because he was the child of Apollo in some legends. Also, in the lost Bassarides of Aeschylus Orpheus was a priest and worshipper of Apollo, for which apostasy he was killed by the Bacchantes of Dionysus. Sometimes Orpheus and Apollo were even conflated (see n. 60 above), as in this stele from Carthage where Apollo-Orpheus stands beneath emblems of the sun and the moon (Fig. 87). Apparently there were many early Christians who took Clement's metaphoric statement about Christ and the sun literally: "Christ [is] the Sun of the Resurrection . . . who with His beams bestows life" (Protr. 9, ANF, p. 81), and who worshipped the sun as an aspect of Christ. Such are the people of whom Eusebius of Alexandria speaks.

For I have known of many who adore and pray to the sun; I know that they implore the rising sun and that they say "have pity on us," and not only the Heliognostics and heretics do this, but the Christians as well, who, abandoning their faith, mingle with the heretics" (PG 86, 453)

In an anathema against heretics, the speaker says, "I curse those who say that Christ is the sun and those who pray to the sun."<sup>70</sup>

Closer to the particular syncretism of these sarcophagi is the statement of St. Augustine who spoke of how the priests of various mystery cults tried to seduce the Christians, apparently by leading them down syncretistic paths.

I remember that the priests of the one in the cap (illius pileati, i.e. Mithras) used to say at one time: "the Capped One is himself a Christian." (Comm. in Joann. VII, i, PL 35, 1440)

And both Justin and Tertullian took pains to point out the dangerous similarity between the Mithraic and the Christian rituals. The Fathers were quite aware that Mithras was probably Christ's most serious rival in the ancient world. The Mithraists, Justin says, with the eager help of the devil,

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<sup>70</sup>Greek text in J. B. Cotelerius, Patrum Qui Temporibus Apostolicis Floruerunt Opera (Antwerp, 1698) I, 538.

copied the Christian rites in an effort to discredit them, and that is why "bread and a cup of water are placed with certain incantations in the mystic rites of one who is being initiated" (Apol. I, lxvi, ANF, pp. 64-65). A similar version of the devil's work is proposed by Tertullian.

If my memory still serves me, Mithra there [in the kingdom of Satan] sets his marks on the foreheads of his soldiers, celebrates also the oblation of bread and introduces an image of a resurrection, and before a sword wreathes a crown. (De Praescript. xl, ANF, p. 48)<sup>71</sup>

These similarities which so disturbed the Fathers did not, apparently, disturb the early Christian artisans as much, for a very practical reason. We know that the painters and sculptors of the Apostolic and early Patristic periods were under some constraint as to their choice of representations of Christ. They could not, on the one hand, identify him too directly with pagan figures, since he had

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<sup>71</sup> See the provocative parallels between early Christianity and Mithraism, the derivations of the Bishop's Mitre from the name of the god and the Pope's tiara from the Persian tiara of Mithras, among many others, in the entertaining account by Esmé Wynne-Tyson, Mithra The Fellow in the Cap (London, 1958), p. 81 ff.





replaced the old mythology with a new. And, on the other hand, they could not turn to Jewish art, which was not as yet freed from the pre-Talmudic hostility towards figurative representation in the temple.<sup>72</sup> Thus they were compelled to use purified pagan types to represent Christ, and, for reasons which should by now be clear, Orpheus was a logical choice. The sheep or rams which replace the bull of Mithras in Christian Orpheus tauroctonos reliefs may leave Orpheus posed a bit unsteadily, but apparently the sculptors felt that they provided the necessary Christian note to justify Orpheus' presence. Looking through the collections of Christian sarcophagi published by Wilpert and Marucchi, one sees that sheep or rams are found on almost all of them and that these animals seem to have been a hallmark of Christian funerary art. The Ostia sarcophagus provides a good example of the purified pagan figure used to represent Christ. On the left-hand register

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<sup>72</sup>On the question of the gradually relaxing strictures against animal and human images in the Jewish art of the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D. see the excellent discussion by Marcel Simon, Verus Israel (Paris, 1948), pp. 34-44.

stands Christ the manfisher. On the upper rim is the inscription: "Firmia, sweet blessed (or holy) soul." On the right-hand register is Christ-Orpheus-Mithras. Apparently the person who commissioned the tomb wished to ensure that Firmia would indeed be blessed, since her body and soul are guarded by the three figures with great power over the stars and the afterlife in antiquity.

Another and certainly not opposing explanation for the syncretism of the sarcophagi is the fact that many Christians patronized pagan workshops, which no doubt produced monuments for both groups. This point has been observed by Ernst Kitzinger.

In the third and fourth centuries there were probably painters and sculptors who worked for both a Christian and a pagan clientele, and it is small wonder that Christian art borrowed from contemporary pagan art its style and sometimes even its subject matter.<sup>73</sup>

Having been trained in the style of classical sarcophagi, having already an acquaintance with Orpheus as a pagan symbol of immortality in funerary contexts, and having executed works which represented Mithras

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<sup>73</sup> Ernst Kitzinger, Early Medieval Art (London, 1940), pp. 3-5.

in the tauroctonos position, it is small wonder that the workshop artisans would combine pagan materials to depict a deity who had as yet no rigidly fixed iconography, particularly if the patron had no clear ideas himself as to what he wanted for a sarcophagus. All the features of such a tomb would have the authority of classical precedent and none would be so pagan as to be objectionable. Thus the artisans of these sarcophagi portrayed a Good Shepherd at once familiar and novel.

#### Orpheus in the Catacombs

When religious and cultural historians of late antiquity think of Orpheus they are likely to think of the wall paintings of the Roman catacombs which depict him. The reasons for this are not hard to find. These frescoes have been well reproduced in J. Wilpert's great collection of catacomb art, Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms (Fribourg, 1903), and have been made accessible in a number of popular works in German, French, Italian, and English. The archeologist or otherwise interested person can even

go to the catacombs and see what remains of the several pictures which show Orpheus the Good Shepherd sitting or standing among his sheep. Moreover, when such books--I think particularly of De Rossi<sup>74</sup> and his English revisers, Northcote and Brownlow say anything about the survival of the antique in early Christian art, they usually point out that the first Christians accepted pagan Orpheus into the catacombs because he seemed to them to be a type of Christ. Like the preserved Chinese duck eggs transmitted from father to son, this generalization has passed from 19th to 20th century writers, neatly contained in its own stone jar.

Whether or not the generalization is true, its frequent occurrence coupled with the wide availability of catacomb pictures has given rise to an unbalanced view of Orpheus in early Christian art. Emphasis on these frescoes has been such as to suggest that these paintings are the only representations of Orpheus in Christian antiquity--an impression which I hope the preceding pages have dispelled.

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<sup>74</sup>Roma Sotterranea, n. 31.

Moreover, of all the pictures of the Good Shepherd in the catacombs, the Orpheus frescoes are a very small minority. These frescoes, though very interesting in themselves, represent only one stage in the development of Orpheus iconography in antiquity, and do not occupy a central position in that line of development. Owing perhaps to the wide dispersion of Orpheus monuments throughout Europe and the Middle East, and consequently to the difficulty of examining all of them, a good deal of nonsense about these frescoes has arisen.

Max Fraipont, the author of a short monograph, Orphée aux Catacombs (Paris, 1935), has argued that the presence of Orpheus in the catacombs can be explained by the fact that he was, not a Christianized pagan figure employed by the artisans, but rather a symbol of faith in love. He maintains that, since there were many intermarriages between pagans and Christians in the early days of the Church, a pagan widow might use Orpheus as a symbol of her fidelity to her husband. Thus the doves sometimes found with Orpheus in the catacombs are not Christian doves, but rather Venus' birds (p. 24 ff.). Fraipont does not

use representations in other media to support his position, nor does he explain why Orpheus is always represented with the animals in the catacombs, rather than leading Eurydice up from the underworld. Fraipont's book, it seems to me, is an excellent illustration of the dangers inherent in considering the catacomb frescoes apart from other Orpheus scenes in antiquity.

The following list contains all of the catacomb frescoes, to my knowledge, which depict Orpheus:

The Cemetery of Domitilla. The central medallion of the ceiling in this cemetery shows Orpheus playing his lyre to various wild and domestic animals (Fig. 88). In the outer registers of the medallion are portrayed various pastoral scenes based on John 10:11-15; Matthew 18:12-14; and Luke 15:4-7, as well as scenes of Moses striking the rock, Daniel with the lions and Christ raising Lazarus. The picture was destroyed and is now known by an 18th-century copy, which may have made the medallion a bit more classical in style than it actually was. The picture has been dated between 150 and 250 A.D.<sup>75</sup> A similar painting still exists in the same cemetery (Fig. 89); it has been dated in the 4th century

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<sup>75</sup>For reproductions, see Garrucci, Storia dell'Arte Cristiana (Prato, 1873-81), pl. 25 and J. Wilpert, p. 55. For dating, see Boulanger, Orphée, p. 149 ff., late, and De Rossi, Roma Sotterranea II, p. 355, early.

Wilpert, pl. 229). One suspects that perhaps the 18th-century copy reproduced the surviving, rather than the lost, fresco.

Cemetery of Priscilla. A very much weathered painting on the arcosolium of this catacomb is supposed to have shown Orpheus in the middle of a herd which is guarded by a dog. Both the sheep and the dog listen to him attentively. A fanciful drawing exists in De Rossi's collection.<sup>76</sup>

Cemetery of Peter and Marcellinus. A painting, much weathered, on the abside of the crypt (Fig. 90) shows Orpheus surrounded by six sheep. It has been dated about 250 A.D. (Wilpert, pl. 98). On the face of the crypt are various biblical scenes: the healing of the Paralytic, a baptism, perhaps of Christ, and Moses striking the rock.

Cemetery of Callixtus. The ceiling medallion of this tomb shows Orpheus playing to two lambs or sheep and two doves (Fig. 91). Around him there are peacocks and sea monsters. The birds were symbols of immortality in Greco-Roman funerary art.<sup>77</sup> The sea monsters perhaps represent

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<sup>76</sup> See De Rossi, Bull. D'Archeologia Christiana (1887), pl. 6, p. 29 and Wilpert, p. 243.

<sup>77</sup> Tertullian, De An., 33 and De Resurrect. Carnis V, follows the story of Homer's metamorphosis in the guise of a peacock given by the Latin poet Ennius. The peacock "cauda sidera portat" in Ovid, Met. XV, 385. In the Vatican Museum, a peacock on a bust of Pomponia Helypis symbolizes her apotheosis.

the legend of Jonah. The lyre, with its thick and clumsy frame and cross-piece, suggests the lyre in the tauroctonos sarcophagi. This fresco has been dated in the 2nd century A.D. (Wilpert, pl. 37).

It is generally agreed that these pastoral scenes of Orpheus show him as the Good Shepherd of the New Testament. More precisely, we should say that the Good Shepherd of the New Testament is shown with the attributes of Orpheus. Visual representations of the Good Shepherd in early Christian art are attempts to create concrete pictures based on the following biblical passages:

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep. . . .  
I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. . . . I lay down my life for the sheep (John 10:11-15).

If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?

And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray (Matthew 10:12-13).

And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. (Luke 15: 5-6, my emphasis).



Two types of Good Shepherd picture develop from these passages. The first type shows the Good Shepherd bearing a sheep on his shoulders and often carrying in addition a milk pot or staff. Luke is the only biblical source for this type. The composition is usually quite symmetrical, as in two frescoes from the cemetery of Peter and Marcellinus (Fig. 92) and one from the cemetery of Callixtus (Fig. 93). The symmetry of these compositions is characteristic of the western art of the period, as we will recall from our discussion above of the Constantinian style. Of the eighty-eight frescoes of the Good Shepherd in the catacombs, most are of this type. Indeed, the asymmetrical, more narrative and less symbolic style of shepherd which we find in the Christian church at Dura-Europos (Fig. 94) does not occur in the Roman cemeteries.<sup>78</sup>

The second type, which is very rare in the catacombs, shows the shepherd with his staff or milk-pot standing, or even more rarely sitting, among his

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<sup>78</sup>C. Hopkins and P. V. C. Baur, The Christian Church at Dura-Europos (New Haven, 1934), p. 12 ff.



sheep on a slight hillock. Because he does not carry any of them, his literary background would seem to be John and Matthew rather than Luke. Two examples of this second type of Good Shepherd are to be found in the Cemetery of Domitilla (Fig. 95) and in the so-called "Heretical" Cemetery of Aurelius (Fig. 96).<sup>79</sup>

While the sheep-bearing Good Shepherd was inspired both by the New Testament parable and by the actual life of the shepherd, the attitude of the figure and the way it carried the sheep derived from a very ancient type, the moscophoros or Hermes-Kriophoros of the Archaic period, and its more recent imitators. There are some eighty sculptures of the calf- and ram-bearing god still surviving, from the 6th century bronze of the Berlin Museum (Fig. 97) and the marble moscophoros from the Acropolis, probably of the same period (Fig. 98), to the Hellenistic copy in Wilton House (Fig. 99). Of the many Christian examples of the Good Shepherd, perhaps

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<sup>79</sup>Published by Carlo Cecchelli, Monumenti Cristiano-Eretici di Roma (Rome, 1944).

the most famous is the piece in the Lateran Museum (Fig. 100).<sup>80</sup> It is even possible that the Parable of the Good Shepherd in the New Testament may owe something to the legend of the kriophoros. Among various legends of animal-bearing gods is the one cited by Pausanias (IX, 22), in which Hermes averted plague from the city by carrying a ram on his shoulders. Thus the figure of Hermes-Kriophoros was a savior figure. Moreover, it was a part of the Mithraic worship, whose affinity with Christianity has already been mentioned. In the Gildhall Museum, London, is a seated Hermes with a ram by his feet, which dates from about 150 A.D. and came from the Walbrook Mithraeum. Even the name of the Good Shepherd himself is not entirely free from pagan elements. In I Peter 5:4 Christ is called the <sup>2</sup>  $\alpha\rho\chi\iota\tau\eta\sigma$  *NEVOS* or "chief shepherd." A somewhat similar epithet was used for priests in the worship of Bacchus at Rome, where the priest was called A R C H I B U C O L U S D E I L I B E R I or chief herdsman

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<sup>80</sup> For an excellent discussion of the Kriophoros type see the monograph by M. A. Veyries, Les Figures Criophores dans l'Art . . . Gréco-Romain et l'Art Chrétien (Paris, 1884).

of the god Liber (Bacchus) in several incantations which Eisler with his usual optimism calls "Orphic." The term "archibucolus" may allude to the priest's function of carrying a kid during a Bacchic procession, but it is hardly Orphic and merely occurs among several other religious titles of the dead men in CIL VI, 504, 510, and 1675.<sup>81</sup>

Even a cursory examination of the extant Orpheus frescoes in the Roman catacombs will indicate their indebtedness to John and Matthew rather than Luke; in all of them Orpheus sits between the sheep; in none does he carry one. His position, his costume and his relation to the animals are all suggestive of the traditional pagan scenes we have examined earlier. In only two respects have the Christian artisans treated the Orpheus legend in an original manner: first, by putting him in the catacomb frescoes of scenes from Christ's

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<sup>81</sup>M. Dussaud, RA I (1903), sees the Christian Good Shepherd in art as developing directly from the Hermes-Malakbel figure, a psychopompos who carries a ram in Palmyran altars: "The type of the Good Shepherd does not derive directly from the Hermes-Kriophoros, but from a young ram-carrying solar god of oriental origin" (p. 378, my trans.).



ministry, and second, by giving him an audience of sheep. Indeed, the remarkable thing about these frescoes is the degree to which Orpheus retains his pagan features in Christian surroundings.

On the basis of the present dating of these paintings it does not seem possible to chart a consistent development from an early pagan Orpheus playing to a variety of wild and domestic animals to a later Orpheus playing only to sheep. We can only conjecture that Christian painters wishing to express the idea of the Good Shepherd must have seized on the pagan Orpheus, and, since they employed him primarily for his symbolic value as a psychopompos, did not see the need to strip him of his pagan features.<sup>82</sup>

The dating of these frescoes, however, is open to question. The early investigations of the Roman catacombs and the publication of the results were carried out under the aegis of the Vatican, and in this work one often notes a commendable but

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<sup>82</sup> See Erwin R. Goodenough "Catacomb Art," Journal of Biblical Literature LXXXI (1962), pp. 133 ff.

unhistorical desire to see a sophisticated Christian art during the very earliest years of the church. Such partiality accounts for the de-emphasis of pagan culture in the backgrounds of catacomb and sarcophagus art, as well as the early dating of the catacombs themselves.

One of the main supports for this thesis that the Good Shepherd was a visual motif important to the earliest Christians is the famous epitaph of Abercius of Hieropolis in Phrygia, supposed to have been written in the middle of the 2nd century A.D.: "My name is Abercius, the disciple of the Holy Shepherd, who feeds his flocks of sheep on the hills and plains and who has great eyes that look in every place."<sup>83</sup> Nunn points out that Abercius died about 150 A.D., so that "he must have been alive when the Fourth Gospel was written, even if its publication is put at the earliest possible date" (p. 29). But the fact that the Good Shepherd is mentioned in an epitaph as early as 150 A.D. does not prove that the

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<sup>83</sup> Trans. H. V. Nunn, Christian Inscriptions (New York, 1954), p. 30.



Christian catacomb painters of the west employed him as a motif in their compositions at that time. It is more probable that the Roman Good Shepherds copy eastern examples of the 2nd and 3rd centuries, and that they themselves are later. The earliest Good Shepherd fresco which can be precisely dated (232 A.D.) is eastern--that on the wall of the church at Dura-Europos.<sup>84</sup> There are so many points of resemblance, on the other hand, between the later mosaics and the catacomb frescoes that a case can be made for their contemporaneity. For instance, compare the style of the mosaics at Ptolemais and Jerusalem (Figs. 4, 6) with that of the Callixtus and Peter and Marcellinus Orpheus. The frontal pose and displaced lyres of the catacomb figures suggest that they are products of the late 3rd or early 4th century.

Another feature of popular art during the late Empire also suggests that the frescoes may be contemporary with the later mosaics. As we have seen, by

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<sup>84</sup>It is interesting that Dura should also be the site of the only other fresco of Orpheus with monotheistic intentions beside the catacomb pictures --the fresco of the Synagogue at Dura.

the late 3rd century the large numbers of animals in the Orpheus mosaics had begun to vie with the musician for compositional interest, and there were beginning to appear scenes of animals with other figures in their midst. Many mosaics and works in other media of the period show large groups of animals at play, presided over by a central figure.

Every person who has marched his parasang a day through Xenophon's Anabasis will remember the lovely description of Cyrus hunting in his park or *παρὰ τὴν*  
*ἐκείνου :*

And there was a great park, full of wild animals, in which he used to hunt on horse-back whenever he wished to exercise himself and his horses. And through the middle of this park flowed the river Menander. (I, ii, 7)

Illustrations of such scenes were popular in late antique art, and the animal paradise, both because of its relation to Christian views of the afterlife and because of its suitability as a setting for the Good Shepherd, was not neglected by the early Christian artists. A mosaic pavement from Thysdrus, North Africa, (Fig. 101) shows the Good Shepherd, with nimbus, in the midst of a scene of animal combat. The

animals pay no more attention to the central figure than did similar animals to Orpheus in contemporary mosaic. The floor is dated in the 4th century A.D. and it should be compared with the Good Shepherds of the catacombs among their sheep. A more pastoral pavement (Fig. 162) shows the Good Shepherd's calming effect on the animals, almost as though he had been substituted in a composition of Orpheus and the animals. It should be noted that this shepherd's charges are both wild and domestic. This floor is from the Villa of Jenah, Beirut, and has been dated about 475-500 A.D.<sup>85</sup>

Apparently the Good Shepherd of the catacomb frescoes in Rome shows the Christian what he may look forward to in the afterlife. First the soul will be carried to the heaven, as the lamb is borne by the shepherd. I. A. Richmond has explained the Christian Kriophoros thus:

If the sacrificial view was retained, the lamb could represent the Lamb of God, the divine victim. If it was to be the symbol of salvation, then the bearer of the lamb

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<sup>85</sup>Published and discussed by M. Chéhab, op. cit., pl. xxxi, p. 65 ff.

is modelled upon Hermes the conductor of souls, while the lamb <sup>is</sup> the soul rescued from destruction.<sup>86</sup>

The notion that the Good Shepherd served as a psychopompos was fairly common and is found in an ancient hymn.

We pray God to grant him a merciful judgement having redeemed him by His death, freed him from sin and reconciled him with the Father. May He be to him the Good Shepherd and carry him on his shoulders.<sup>87</sup>

The soul/sheep who crowd around Orpheus the Good Shepherd in paradise, as the fresco painters portrayed it would find a topography derived from Campanian pastoral landscape fresco and from the mythological and ornamental pastoral poetry made popular in Hellenistic times by Theocritus, Bion, and Moschus. In the Liturgy of St. Basil of Alexandria, Christ is asked to lead the Christian souls to "a grassy place, by quiet waters, in a luxurious park *παρὰ δέσπονῃ τρυφῇ* from whence

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<sup>86</sup> I. A. Richmond, Archeology and the After-life in Pagan and Christian Imagery (Oxford, 1950), pp. 44-45.

<sup>87</sup> Muratori, Lit. Rom. Vet., I, 751 and Origen, Hom. in Gen., 9, 3.

pain, sadness and trembling have fled" (PG 31, 1641). It is to this paradise Orpheus the Good Shepherd has conducted the souls by the power of his music and it was probably to such scenes of Orpheus the Good Shepherd among his flock which Prudentius alluded to when he spoke of certain works of art which showed "the shepherd himself nurtur[ing] his sheep with the ice-cold water of the pool, for he sees them thirsting for the rivers of Christ" (Perist., XII).

PLATE I



Fig. 1. Roman mosaic, Blanzky-Les-Fimes, France, 3d-4th Century A.D.



Fig. 2. Roman mosaic, Perugia, Italy, early 2d century A.D.



Fig. 3. Roman mosaic, Piazza Amerina, Sicily, c. 3d century A.D.



PLATE II

Fig. 4. Roman mosaic, Ptolemais, Cyrenaica, c. 4th century A.D.

Fig. 5. Roman mosaic, Edessa, Syria, 3d-4th century A.D.



Fig. 6. Mosaic pavement from funeral chapel, Jerusalem, 6th century A.D.



PLATE III



Fig. 7. Fresco, House of Orpheus  
Pompei, 1st century B.C.



Fig. 8. Roman mosaic, Wood-  
chester Villa, England, 4th  
century A.D.



Fig. 9. Roman mosaic, Barton  
Farm Villa, Cirencester, Eng-  
land, 4th century A.D.

Fig. 11. Roman mosaic, Forêt de  
Brotonne(Rouen) c. 3d century  
A.D.



Fig. 10. Roman mosaic, Casa  
Consula, Salona(Split) 3d-4th  
century A.D.







Fig. 12. Roman mosaic, St. Romain-en-Galle (Lyon) 3d-4th century A.D.



Fig. 13. Roman mosaic, House of the Leberii, Oudna, North Africa, c. 3d century A.D.



Fig. 14. Roman mosaic, Newton-St.-Loe (Bristol), 4th century A.D.



Fig. 15. Roman mosaic, Rottweil, c. 3d century A.D.



Fig. 16. Roman mosaic, Isle of Wight, c. 4th century A.D.



Fig. 17. Consular diptych of Anastasius, c. 516 A.D., Cab. de Med., Paris.



Fig. 18. Christ Pantokrator, codex of Oesmas Indicopleustes, Vat. Gr. 699, fol. 89r. 9th century A.D.



Fig. 19. Roman mosaic, Saragossa, c. 4th century A.D.

PLATE VI



Fig. 20. Roman mosaic, Cherchell, North Africa, c. 3d century A.D.



Fig. 21. Mosaic, Cos, Greece, Roman period.



Fig. 22. Mosaic, Leptis Magnis, North Africa, c. 3d-4th century A.D.

Fig. 23. Synagogue fresco, Dura-Europos, 225 A.D.



Fig. 25. Psalter illustration, BM MS. Cott. Tib. CVI, fol. 30, c. 1050 A.D.

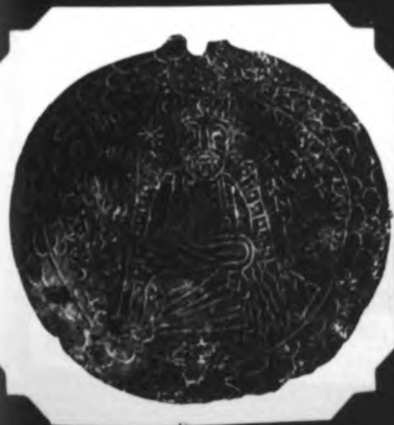


Fig. 24. Early Byzantine magical amulet.



Fig. 26. Arch of Titus,  
Rome, 1st century A.D.



Fig. 27. Mummy portrait from  
Roman Egypt, B.M. 21810



Fig. 28. Sarcophagus from Sidon,  
Roman period



29. Coptic tomb, El-Bagawat,  
Egypt, 7th century A.D.



Fig. 30. Fresco, dome, Church  
of the Redeemer, Athens, Byz-  
antine.

PLATE VIII



Fig. 31. Coptic tombstone, Mainz Central Museum, 7th century A.D.



Fig. 33. Coptic textile, 5th century A.D. Louvre



Fig. 32. Coptic stele, 7th century, B.M. 1790



Fig. 34. Fresco, Monastery of St. Apollo, Bawit, Egypt, (Chapel XXXII)



PLATE IX



Fig. 35. Ivory Pyx, Bobbio,  
5th-6th century A.D.



Fig. 36. Ivory pyx, Bargello  
Museum, Florence, 5th-6th cent-  
ury A.D.



Fig. 37. Coptic textile,  
c. 6th century A.D., Coll.  
R. Tyler.

Fig. 38. Adam and the animals, ivory diptych, East Christian, late Empire, Bargello Museum, Florence



PLATE X



Fig. 39. Marble relief, late Empire, Knoll & Castle, England



Fig. 40. Good Shepherd in an animal paradise, Coptic textile, 5th century A.D. Boston Museum of Fine Arts.



Fig. 41. Plato playing to the animals, Madhū Khanshad, MS of Nizānī (photo Coll. Warburg Institute)

PLATE XI



Fig. 42 a), b) c)  
Magical amulet, hematite,  
Berlin Museum, c. 3rd century  
A.D.



Figs. 43-4. Magical amulet,  
British Museum, late Empire



Fig. 45. Magical amulet, Uni-  
versity College, London. 3rd-  
4th century A.D.



Fig. 46. Ampulla from Syria,  
6th century A.D.



Fig. 47. Gem, Geza, Syria, Brit-  
ish Museum, 3rd-4th century A.D.



Fig. 48. Gem, Constantina,  
British Museum, 3rd-4th century  
A.D.



Fig. 49. Gem, Rome, 3rd-4th  
century A.D.



PLATE XII



Fig. 50. Graffito, Palace of the Caesars, Kircher Museum, Rome, 2d-3rd century A.D.



Fig. 51. Seth, magic papyrus, 2391, Louvre, late Empire.



Fig. 52. Seth, magical gem, University College, London Fig. 53. Satirical Collection, 3rd-4th century late Empire, A.D.



Fig. 54. Coin, late Empire.



Fig. 56. St. Sabina gate, c. 420 A.D.



Fig. 55. Magical amulet, Montagnana, Italy, late Empire



Fig. 57. Ivory carving, British Museum, 5th-6th century A.D.



Fig. 58. Fresco, church of St. Maria Antigua, Rome, 8th century A.D.



Fig. 59. Utrecht Psalter  
Utrecht University Library,  
MS. 484, fol. 70r. c. 6th  
century A.D.



Fig. 60. Reliquary, Palestine,  
Lateran Treasure, 6th century  
A.D.



Fig. 61. East Christian  
amulet, 6th century A.D.



Fig. 62. a) b), Tomb stelae,  
Gallo-Roman



Fig. 63. Stele, Dura-Europos, Syria, Roman period.



Fig. 64. Funerary relief, Albano, National Museum, Copenhagen, 2d century A.D.

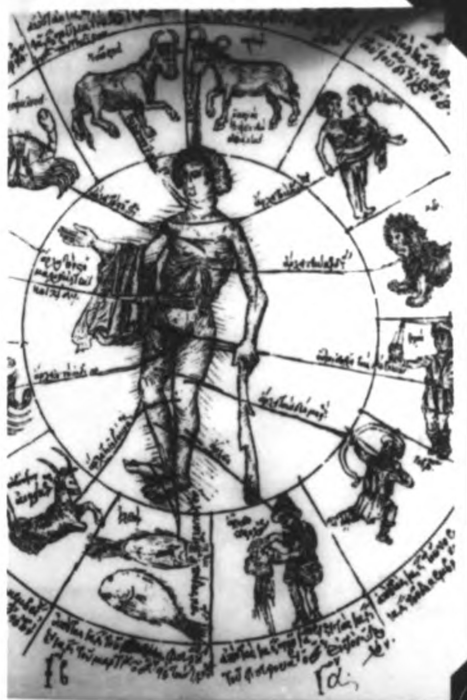


Fig. 65. Miniature from medical manuscript, Byzantine period.



Fig. 66. Magical gem, Cabinet of Florence, late Empire.



Fig. 68. Lamp, Berlin Museum 3rd.-4th century A.D.



Fig. 67. Votive relief of Solene, British Museum, late Empire.



Fig. 69. Sarcophagus fragment, Galla-Roman, found at Casarens.



Fig. 70. Sarcophagus cover, Lauriscum, 4th century A.D.



Fig. 71. Tomb relief, Interolasa, 3rd-4th century A.D.



Fig. 72. Stele, Pettau, Yugoslavia, 3rd-4th century A.D.



Fig. 73. Apollo-Nebo, clay tessera from Palmyra, Roman period.



Fig. 74. Tibicini monument,  
Museo Comunale, Rome, early  
Empire



Fig. 75. Sculpture of Orpheus,  
Ottoman Museum, Istanbul, 4th-  
5th century A.D.



Fig. 79. Mosaic pavement,  
Volubilis, North Africa, c.  
4th century A.D.



Fig. 76. Sculpture of Orpheus,  
Archaeological Museum, Athens,  
4th-5th century A.D.



Fig. 77. Sculpture of Orpheus,  
Sabratha, Tripoli, 4th-5th  
century A.D.



Fig. 78. Sculpture of Orpheus,  
Byblos, 4th-5th century A.D.





Fig. 80. Sarcophagus, Baths of Titus and Trajan, Rome, 4th-5th century A.D.



Fig. 83. Sarcophagus fragment, Cemetery of Prætextatus, Rome, 4th-5th century A.D.



Fig. 81. Sarcophagus, Porto Torres, Sardinia, 4th-5th century A.D.



Fig. 84. Sarcophagus fragment, Museum of Callixtus, Rome, 4th-5th century A.D.



Fig. 82. Sarcophagus, Ostia, Lateran Museum, 4th-5th century A.D.



Fig. 85. Mithras tauroctonos,  
Vatican Museum, c. 4th cent-  
ury A.D.



Fig. 86. Mithras tauroctonos,  
Archeological Museum, Florence,  
c. 4th century A.D.



Fig. 87. Orpheus-Apollo, stele,  
Carthage, British Museum  
125183, c. 4th century A.D.



Fig. 88. Orpheus fresco, Cemetery of Domitilla, Rome, c. 150-250 A.D.?



Fig. 90. Orpheus fresco, Cemetery of Peter and Marcellinus, Rome, c. 250 A.D.?



Fig. 89. Orpheus fresco, Cemetery of Domitilla, Rome, c. 4th century A.D.



Fig. 91. Orpheus fresco, Cemetery of Callixtus, Rome, c. 2d century A.D.





Fig. 92. Good Shepherd fresco,  
Cemetery of Peter and Marcellinus,  
Rome, c. 3rd century A.D.



Fig. 93. Good Shepherd fresco,  
Cemetery of Callistus, Rome, 2d-  
3rd century A.D.

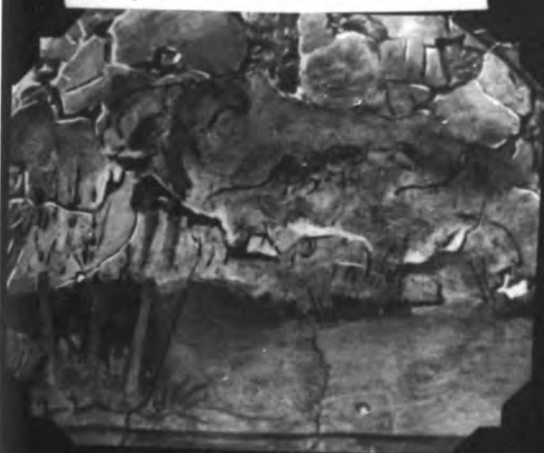


Fig. 94. Good Shepherd fresco,  
Christian church, Dura-Europos,  
Syria, c. 230 A.D.



Fig. 95. Good Shepherd fresco,  
Cemetery of Domitilla, Rome,  
c. 4th century A.D.



Fig. 96. Good Shepherd fresco,  
Cemetery of Aurelius, Rome,  
3rd-4th century A.D.

PLATE XXI



Fig. 97. Kriophoros, Creta,  
Berlin Museum, 6th century  
B.C.



Fig. 99. Kriophoros, archaizing  
style, Wilton House, Hellenistic  
period.



Fig. 98. Mosephoros, Athens,  
Acropolis, 6th century B.C.



Fig. 100. Good Shepherd,  
Lateran Museum, Rome, 3rd-4th  
century A.D.



Fig. 101. Good Shepherd in an animal paradise. Mosaic from Thysdrus, Barde Museum, Tunisia c. 4th century A.D.



Fig. 102. Good Shepherd in an animal paradise. Mosaic from Villa of Jannah, Beirut, c. 475-500 A.D.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### ORPHEUS EXPOUNDED: MEDIEVAL COMMENTATORS

#### ON THE LEGEND

Phillip Sidney was surprised that Chaucer could see life so clearly in his "mistie time" and Milton thought of Shakespeare as an untutored natural genius, warbling "his native wood-notes wild." These attitudes tell us more about Sidney and Milton than about the authors they spoke of. Any writer is bound by the preoccupations of his age when he tries to explain or judge an earlier author, and cannot help seeing the older man by the light of a modern lantern. So Sidney saw himself as a modern man, able to reject the superstition and ignorance of the 14th century and Milton felt that a good writer without a university education could only have been a natural genius.

This axiom holds true even more strongly for medieval writers and their attitudes towards classical

authors. In the Middle Ages, sophisticated men thought that England's Winchester used to be called Thrace, that Virgil was a magician, that Ovid had read the New Testament and that Orpheus and Eurydice were courtly lovers. Many of these ideas were held because of the way in which medieval commentators explained classical authors in contemporary terms, historically, etymologically and allegorically.

This chapter will deal with medieval expositors of the classics and with their efforts to make Orpheus and Eurydice into medieval people. I have discussed these commentators under four headings:

1) Boethius as a commentator on the Orpheus legend in his Consolation of Philosophy, 2) medieval commentators on Boethius, 3) medieval commentators on the legend of Orpheus in the Metamorphoses of Ovid, 4) the mythographic tradition--Orpheus and Eurydice in the mythological reference works used in the Middle Ages. By examining what all of these people say about Orpheus, and how they say it, we can learn much about the workings of the medieval mind as it tried to fit classical mythology into medieval life.

Boethius' Treatment of the  
Orpheus Legend

"Of all books extant of all kinds, Homer is the first and best," said George Chapman in the 16th century. A medieval writer would probably have substituted Boethius for Homer. It would be hard to name a poem which was more popular in the Middle Ages than the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius. Over four hundred manuscripts of the work still survive, while of a very popular writer such as Ovid far fewer remain. The Consolation seems to have been owned by many sorts of people: there are crabbed, hastily done copies intended for use in schools or commissioned by a rising bourgeoisie, as well as beautifully illuminated manuscripts belonging to noblemen and kings.

One reason for the great fondness of the Middle Ages for Boethius' poem may be that Boethius seemed to medieval men a classical author of the stature of Horace or Virgil. His familiarity with Hellenic and late antique thought, his use of Greek, his scientific and musical knowledge, his use of the form of the Menippean satire in the Consolation--all

of these things made him perhaps difficult for a Carolingian reader or even a reader of the 14th century, but at the same time a challenge to the medieval schoolmaster and commentator. It is hard to say whether the Consolation of Philosophy gave rise to certain of the literary and philosophical tastes of the Middle Ages or whether it only appealed strongly to those already in existence. Yet it does seem as though the Consolation, more than any other classical or antique work, attracted commentators in such numbers and of so wide a range of interests that to describe the commentaries on this book is, in effect, to outline the preoccupations of the Middle Ages.

The story of Orpheus and Eurydice which appears in the Consolation is thus of interest to us not only in itself--for Boethius' treatment of it--but for the many subsequent commentaries it inspired, both directly and indirectly. Many of the men who wrote on this work were drawn to it by the Platonic and neo-Platonic idea it expressed, especially in the meter beginning, "O qui perpetua mundum" (III, m. 9), which paraphrases parts of the Timaeus. Others were interested in

Boethius' style and use of meter (e.g. Lupus of Ferrières) as a model to be emulated. A large number of the extant commentaries seem to have been prepared for use in schools, explaining at length--and often inaccurately--what might seem to us the simplest classical or historical allusions, as well as points of grammar and etymology. Yet we must remember that to a 9th-century student, cut off from Hellenic thought by ignorance of Greek and a lack of books, Boethius' allusions were often obscure. Moreover, to these Christian students, pagan myths needed to be made if not Christian at least ethically relevant. Boethius was the first Latin writer to develop an ethical allegory from the story of Orpheus and Eurydice in the underworld, and the effect of his version on subsequent conceptions of the legend can not be overemphasized. The schoolbook commentaries, as can be imagined, varied greatly in quality as well as in approach. But those in which the main emphasis was mythographic--in which the classical legends to which Boethius had referred were retold, amplified, and given allegorical meanings--are of particular interest to the historian of ideas.



Though Boethius was considered a Christian by his commentators, and was thought to be the author of certain dogmatic tractates, the Consolation contains no references to Christ, to the Old or New Testaments, or to the Church Fathers. Boethius may have been a Christian, indeed must have been one at least nominally to hold office under Theodoric, but his poem shows him more as an heir to late antique pagan culture.<sup>1</sup> While his life has been discussed at length, the facts are few and the conjectures many. The most reliable evidence for his thought would seem to be his work itself, where, in the Consolation at least, Boethius is consoled by a woman who represents Greek and Roman wisdom.

Here is how Boethius interprets the Orpheus myth:

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<sup>1</sup>For discussions of Boethius' Christianity see E. K. Rand, Founders of the Middle Ages (Cambridge, Mass., 1929); Helen Barrett, Boethius, Some Aspects of His Times and Work (Cambridge, England, 1940); Howard Rollin Patch, The Tradition of Boethius (New York, 1935); R. Carton, "Le Christianisme et l'Augustinisme de Boèce," Mélanges Augustiniens (Paris, 1931). In an interesting article, "The Legend of Boethius' Martyrdom," Speculum XXI (1946), William Bark effectively dismisses the idea that Boethius was martyred because of his hostility to Theodoric's Arianism (p. 312 ff.).

Happy is he who can look into the shining spring of good; happy is he who can break the heavy chains of earth.

Long ago the Thracian poet, Orpheus, mourned for his dead wife. With his sorrowful music he made the woodland dance and the rivers stand still. He made the fearful deer lie down bravely with the fierce lions; the rabbit no longer feared the dog quieted by his song.

But as the sorrow within his breast burned more fiercely, that music which calmed all nature could not console its maker. Finding the gods unbending, he went to the regions of hell. There he sang sweet songs to the music of his harp, songs drawn from the noble fountains of his goddess mother, songs inspired by his powerful grief and the love which doubled his grief.

Hell is moved to pity when, with his melodious prayer, he begs the favor of those shades. The three-headed guardian of the gate is paralyzed by that new song; and the Furies, avengers of crimes who torture guilty souls with fear, are touched and weep in pity. Ixion's head is not tormented by the swift wheel, and Tantalus, long maddened by his thirst, ignores the waters he now might drink. The vulture is filled by the melody and ignores the liver of Tityus.

At last, the judge of souls, moved by pity, declares, "We are conquered. We return to this man his wife, his companion, purchased by his song. But our gift is bound by the condition that he must not look back until he has left hell." But who can give lovers a law? Love is a stronger law unto itself. As they approached the edge of night, Orpheus looked back at Eurydice, lost her, and died.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Both R. H. Green and "I. T." hedge a bit on the meaning of lines 50-51. The text reads "Orpheus Eurydicen suam/ Vidit, perdidit, occidit." "I. T." renders

This fable applies to all of you who seek to raise your minds to sovereign day. For whoever is conquered and turns his eyes to the pit of hell, looking into the the inferno, loses all the excellence he has gained. (III, m. 12)<sup>3</sup>

Boethius' treatment of the Orpheus story has its most important antecedent in the allegorical treatment of myth practiced by the Pseudo-Heraclitus and other Alexandrian writers, a method eventually transmitted to Philo and to Clement of Alexandria and thence to the Latin west. Although it was generally believed, on the basis of certain remarks by Cassiodorus and Ennodius,<sup>4</sup> that Boethius studied

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them "both lose and kill/ Her and himself with foolish love," while Green says "Orpheus looked back at Eurydice, lost her and died." The question here is whether or not to take "occidit" as a transitive verb, which the metrical pattern of the line suggests that it is. The weight of tradition argues for a transitive rendering: Orpheus saw his Eurydice, lost her and killed her. While there are many versions of the story of Orpheus' death, in none does he die upon seeing Eurydice fall back to Hades. Ovid and Virgil, whom Boethius seems to follow, place the death of Orpheus some time after the death of Eurydice.

<sup>3</sup> All quotations from the Consolation are drawn from the translation by Richard H. Green (Indianapolis, 1962). This translation is generally clearer than that of "I. T." used by the editors of the Loeb Classical Library edition.

<sup>4</sup> See Var. I, 45, PL 69, 539 and VII, 13, PL 63, 120.

philosophy at Athens where he made the acquaintance of such neo-Platonists as were teaching there, one of the most recent and one of the best scholars on Boethius, Pierre Courcelle, is of the opinion that it was not at Athens but at Alexandria that Boethius studied.<sup>5</sup> He points out that Cassiodorus says only that Boethius entered into a study of the schools of Athens without saying that he was actually there. After the death of Proclus in 485 A.D. the neo-Platonic school at Athens had sadly decayed,<sup>6</sup> while Alexandria had become the center of learning for science, philosophy and the verbal arts. Courcelle argues that Boethius was much influenced by the Alexandrian commentator Ammonius, who was a disciple of Proclus. He finds many verbal parallels which suggest that Boethius composed his commentaries on Aristotle with Ammonius' work before him. Whether or not this is true, the works of the neo-Platonists of Alexandria unquestionably provided Boethius with many of

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<sup>5</sup> Pierre Courcelle, "Boèce et l'École d'Alexandrie," Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'École Française de Rome LII (1935), p. 186.

<sup>6</sup> See Aneas of Gaza, PG 85, 877.

the ideas in the Consolation of Philosophy.

Aside from philosophical indebtedness to the school of Alexandria, there is another reason to link Boethius to Alexandrian thought, and this is that he uses the story of Orpheus and Eurydice at all. The legend is one of the very few stories from Hellenic mythology told at any length in the Consolation. As was pointed out earlier, emphasis on the love story of Orpheus, rather than on his trip with the Argonauts or his taming of the animals, was first developed in Alexandrian poetry. Though Boethius is probably following the legend of Orpheus in Ovid and Virgil, both of these writers were indebted to Alexandrian authors for their sources. Furthermore, the tradition of a named wife for Orpheus begins with the bucolic poet Moschus, who wrote in the Alexandrian manner. Boethius himself may have tried his hand at a pastoral poem in the Alexandrian vein--the sort which treated of love and in which the story of Orpheus and Eurydice would likely have occurred--having been supposed, when he was young, to have written a "carmen bucolicum."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Hermann Usener, Anecdota Holderi (Bonn, 1877), p. 142.

Pagan, Jewish and Christian writers of Alexandria during the Roman period, as we have seen, had each their own reasons for wishing to find moral utility in ancient and sanctified legends which on the surface were incredible. If we compare Boethius' handling of the Orpheus legend with the allegorical method of the Pseudo-Heraclitus, for example, who wished to vindicate Homer of the charge of impiety, we find striking similarities of approach. The Pseudo-Heraclitus saw the gods of whom Homer spoke as representing various virtues and vices, so that moral qualities were fitted into a complex drama. His assignation of parts, so to speak, was based on Plato's division of the soul into three parts--the mind ( $\nu\acute{o}\upsilon\varsigma$ ), the passions of violence ( $\theta\upsilon\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$ ), and the passions of desire ( $\epsilon\pi\iota\theta\upsilon\mu\acute{o}\nu\iota\alpha$ ). Thus Athena and Hermes personify mind or wisdom; Ares is the passion of anger; and Aphrodite is the passion of desire. The wise man, in watching the moral drama of the Iliad, learns how to govern his own passions and give reign to mind. Here is how the Pseudo-Heraclitus explains the legend of Odysseus:

The wanderings of Odysseus, if one looks at them closely, are nothing but a great allegory. Odysseus is an instrument of the virtues with which Homer is concerned. By his agent Homer teaches wisdom, for he hates the vices of mankind . . . . The savage passion in each of us Odysseus has cauterized, so to speak, in the fire of his exhortations and has blinded it, and this monster has the name of Cyclops, or the one who robs us of our judgments . . . . Wisdom--that is, Odysseus--descended as far as Hades, in order not to leave any realm of experience unexplored, even Hell.<sup>7</sup>

Although Boethius' poem on Orpheus and Eurydice states its moral only at the end, rather than throughout as in the passage above, the use of pagan material for ethical purposes is the same. Boethius' poem is structured somewhat like a sermon, opening with the text to be discussed: "Happy is he who can look into the shining spring of good; happy is he who can break the heavy chains of earth." The story of the lovers is thus placed in the position of an exemplum and, as we would expect, is followed by a summation pointing to the moral which can be drawn from both the exemplum and the text.

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<sup>7</sup>Pseudo-Heraclitus, Allégories d'Homère, ed. F. Buffière (Paris, 1962), ch. 70.

The "text" set at the head of this passage by Boethius is closely related to the moral schema superimposed on the Odyssey by the Pseudo-Heraclitus. Boethius, too, is concerned with divisions of the soul, though here it is a bi- rather than a tri-partite Platonic division. He has just been discussing the importance of unity, both as the natural state of God and as the state toward which all creatures tend. The highest happiness, as Philosophy has shown Boethius, is to be attained only when the soul has purified itself enough to rise and reunite itself with God. While mind, the higher part of the soul, naturally seeks to rejoin the intelligence from whence it came, it is hindered by the weight of the lower part, or earthly desires.

The Lady Philosophy, singing this meter, makes a clear distinction between the shining source ("fontem . . . lucidem") of good and the heavy bonds of earth ("gravis/ Terrae . . . vincula"). At the beginning of the meter we learn that heaven, light and mind--all immaterial things--are opposed to earth, darkness and weight--material things. This theme is



one in which Boethius takes considerable interest and one to which he returns several times in the Consolation. As early as the second meter of Book One he tells how his mind is "dulled, drowned in the overwhelming depths. It wanders in outer darkness, deprived of its natural light." The state in which Boethius finds himself was not always so. His mind, before his imprisonment and subsequent despondency, used to course the heavens and understand the stars and seasons. Because of concern with material objects, however, "now he lies here, bound down with heavy chains, the light of his mind gone out; his head is bowed down and he is forced to stare at the dull earth." But philosophy offers a way for the mind to be free of these chains. It is not in gold or jewels or any material substance that true value is to be found. Men "dig the earth in search of the good which soars above the star-filled heavens" (III, m.8). It is through philosophy that they can reach the home of intellectible values. "My wings are swift," says Philosophy, "able to soar beyond the heavens. The quick mind which wears them scorns the hateful earth

and climbs above the globe of the immense sky, leaving the clouds below" (IV, m.1).

In these passages Boethius is developing a classical commonplace--that man was made so that he could behold the sky or home of reason, while the irrational animal, whose nature is associated with the material rather than the spiritual world, faces the earth as he walks.<sup>8</sup> As he wrote the Consolation Boethius must have remembered Plato's remarks on this subject.

God invented and gave us sight to the end that we might behold the courses of the intelligence in the heavens, and apply them to the courses of our own intelligence which are akin to them, the unperturbed to the perturbed; and that we, learning them and partaking of the natural truth of reason, might imitate the absolutely unerring courses of God and regulate our own vagaries. (Tim. Jowett, 47a)

Plato's words had also influenced Cicero and Ovid to remark on the upright man (De Nat. II, 56 and Met. I, 84-88), and by the time Boethius wrote of him, homo erectus had become a commonplace:

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<sup>8</sup>The idea that man was homo erectus was thought to be contained in the very word for man, *ἄνθρωπος*. Arnold Williams has noted in The Common Expositor (Chapel Hill, 1948), p. 231, that "the Greek anthropos is quite

The human race alone lifts its head to heaven and stands erect, despising the earth. Man's figure teaches, unless folly has bound you to earth, that you who look upward with your head held high should also raise your soul to sublime things, lest while your body is raised above the earth, your mind should sink to the ground under its burden. (V, m.3)

The reason that the soul inclines upwards is that it came originally from the heavens. Boethius believes, in the Consolation, in the pre-existence of souls (III, m.2 and pr.3). His view, based on neo-Pythagorean and stoic ideas, is that the soul descended into the body and that it became heavy enough to stay on earth through the impurities produced by passion and desire. Descending from the Empyrean, the soul grows increasingly impure as it passes through the various planetary spheres. If, in addition to its naturally acquired impurities, its owner on earth loads it further with material concerns, it can never, or only with the greatest difficulty, ascend again. On the other hand, a proper life on earth helps to cleanse the soul of its impurities.

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generally supposed, on the authority of Plato, to come from the word or phrase--anathreo is the one offered by Plato--meaning look up at."

To Boethius, the story of Orpheus and Eurydice expresses the idea of the soul, freed from the bonds of earth and temporalia by a special dispensation and at last moving toward the union with the one, suddenly yielding to the power of a passion, in this case epithumia or love, and so giving up its liberty. We will recall that in the story as Boethius and others tell it Orpheus, who is usually presented sympathetically as a wise and talented man, is just at the mouth of hell when he makes his mistake. Boethius renders it "the edge of night" (noctis . . . terminos), Ovid as the "margin of upper earth" (Met. X, 55); that is, Orpheus is on the brink of seeing the light of heaven after the darkness of the infernal regions. He is, then, leaving the material substance, dark earth, and moving towards the immaterial heaven.

For Boethius the fable of Orpheus is monitory; it warns us of the power of the passions over the upper part of the soul. Orpheus represents the human soul fleeing the body and the earth but dragged back by his inability to reject temporalia--his love for Eurydice.

## The Commentators on Boethius'

Consolation

Medieval commentators on the Consolation of Boethius attempted to make Orpheus and Eurydice into real people--to show them as concerned with the same problems as those which confronted the reader of their own time. Two strains of the Orpheus legend grew out of this effort. The more prevalent strain was ethical and represented an attempt on the part of the commentators to find moral precepts in the story which would make it an improving and timely one. The second strain, less prominent, was characterized by an interest in Orpheus and Eurydice as true lovers or as romance hero and heroine following the precepts of courtly lovers. This strain was to become more widespread in literary treatments of the Orpheus myth. It culminated, in the Middle Ages, in the romance Sir Orfeo and in Robert Henryson's "Orpheus and Eurydice," which we shall consider in the last chapter of this study. Generally those commentaries which place Orpheus above Eurydice, either in his capacity as a husband or as a moral example, tend to be in the more ethical tradition,

and those which see them as equal, or even with Eurydice as the superior of Orpheus, tend to be in the romance tradition.

I have limited my discussion of these two traditions in the commentaries to authors who, in dealing with the story of Orpheus given by Boethius, made some major contribution to the legend. The commentators I shall consider here are: Remigius of Auxerre, Notker Labeo, William of Conches, Nicholas Trivet, two anonymous Italian translators of the Consolation, an anonymous French translator of the school of Jean de Meun, and finally, the French translator Peter of Paris. All of these writers were in one way or another responsible for the medieval Orpheus who differs very much from his Hellenic or Hellenistic prototype.

Remigius of Auxerre. The first extant medieval writer to comment directly on the Orpheus meter of Boethius, Remy or Remigius of Auxerre, wrote his commentary on the Consolation about 904 A.D. Remigius was a Burgundian relative of Lupus of Ferrières and a pupil of Heric in the Benedictine house of St. Germain

at Auxerre. He taught at Reims for a time, went to Paris where he was probably connected with the monastery of St. Germain-des-Pres, and probably died at Lorraine in the first decade of the 10th century.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to his work on Boethius he wrote commentaries on Sedulius, Martianus Capella, Juvenal, Avianus, Cato, Persius and possibly Prudentius.<sup>10</sup> The Boethius commentary exists in a number of anonymous manuscripts, but in Treves 1093, a manuscript of the 11th century, it is specifically attributed to Remigius by the scribe, "Incipit expositio in libro Boetii de Consolatione Philosophiae Remigii." Pierre Courcelle is of the opinion that it is definitely by him,<sup>11</sup> although at one time this commentary was thought

<sup>9</sup>See H. Stewart, "A Commentary by Remigius . . ." JTS XVII (1915), pp. 23-24.

<sup>10</sup>On this last attribution, see the discussion by E. K. Rand in his edition of the commentary in Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Lateinische Philologie des Mittelalters I, 2 (1906).

<sup>11</sup>Pierre Courcelle, "Étude Critique sur les Commentaires de la 'Consolation' de Boèce," Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age XII (1939), pp. 12-16.

to be the work of Johannes Scotus and was edited and printed as such by E. T. Silk in 1935.<sup>12</sup>

Remigius' discussion of Book Three of the Consolation is not so much an extended commentary as it is a series of glosses on particular passages. The mythological glosses, of most concern for us here, like those throughout the work are drawn from a wide variety of ancient authors, among whom are Avianus, Cato, Cicero, Juvenal, Hyginus, Lucan, Ovid, Pacuvius, Persius, Plautus, Ptolemy, Solinus, Suetonius, Virgil, Claudian, Sedulius, Augustine, Jerome, Gregory of Nazianzen and John Chrysostom, though it must not be assumed that Remigius had a first-hand acquaintance with the works of all of these authors; he may have had access to them only in florilegia. Remigius also borrowed heavily from the commentaries of Servius on the poems

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<sup>12</sup>E. T. Silk, ed. Saeculi Noni Auctoris in Boetii Consolationem Philosophiae Commentarius, Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome IX (1935). The question of Scotus' authorship of this commentary is an involved one and need not detain us here. In "Pseudo-Johannes Scotus . . . and the Early Commentaries on Boethius," Medieval and Renaissance Studies III (1954) Silk abandoned his attribution of this commentary to Scotus. His original arguments were effectively rebutted by Courcelle, "Etude," pp. 21 ff., who gives further bibliography on the controversy.



of Virgil and drew much of his etymological information and natural history from Isidore's Etymologiae.<sup>13</sup> In addition he very likely made use of one or more commentaries on the Consolation written in the 9th century, which have not survived.

Remigius opens his discussion of the Orpheus meter by telling the reader:

This song is a fable and it praises above all others those who, having laid aside carnal desires, raise themselves to the light of true blessedness. And this fable warns us that no one should look backward after he once finds the place where the true good is situated, or after finding the highest good. Now [God] esteems and commends those happy ones who can come to his brightness. That song, on the other hand, speaks to those who, after they have acknowledged the way of truth and advanced further on it, return to human desires and thus ruin the work they have begun. Just so, Orpheus lost his wife from looking backwards. (Silk, Saeculi Noni, p. 217)

Remigius has added the idea of a God (*eius claritatem*) where his author has a more general heaven, but although he mentions Orpheus at the end of the gloss, he has not made of the story a vehicle for the ideas

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<sup>13</sup> "Etude," p. 16. See also Courcelle's "La Culture Antique de Remi d'Auxerre," Latomus VII (1948), pp. 252-53.

he advances in his interpretation. Remigius does not seem to be following any other commentator in this passage, but rather tries to explain it himself.<sup>14</sup>

Next Remigius supplies the background information that Orpheus was a harper whose wife, beloved by Aristeus, was killed in a wild place. Although there is no mention of a serpent in the version printed by Silk, differences in wording in other manuscripts (e.g. B. N. Lat. 15090) suggest that this detail may occur in other versions of this commentary.

He then retells the fable, simplifying and elaborating upon his original. On the powers of

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<sup>14</sup>The Old English translation of Boethius by King Alfred gives a very similar elaboration of the moralitas: "These fables teach every man that would flee the darkness of hell and come to the light of the True Goodness that he should not look towards his old sins, so as again to commit them as fully as he once did. For whosoever with entire will turneth his mind back to the sins he hath left, and then doeth them and taketh full pleasure in them, and never after thinketh of forsaking them, that man shall lose all his former goodness, unless he repent." W. J. Sedgefield, tr., King Alfred's Version of the Consolations of Boethius (Oxford, 1900), p. 118. Though there are many interesting expansions and additions to the meter in Alfred's version, they have principally to do with the romance tradition and will be considered further on.

Orpheus' music he explains that,

. . . Orpheus is reported to have made  
the woods run and the waters stand still  
because he was a theologian and led men  
from wild ways to a civilized life.  
(Silk, Saeculi Noni, p. 217)

He may have gotten this interpretation of Orpheus as a civilizing force from Horace (Ars P. I, 392) or from Maximus of Tyre, both of whom, it will be recalled, offered this Euhemeristic interpretation. As Remigius goes over the story, he describes in his own words the descent to Hades, the beauty of Orpheus' song there, the pact with the gods of the underworld, and the loss of Eurydice when he looks back. Occasionally he offers a common-sense explanation for a puzzling point, such as Boethius' use of the word impotens to describe Orpheus' grief. He says, "it is a natural thing as when those who are sad about insignificant things give themselves up entirely to grief and therefore add powerlessness to their exaggerated sorrows" (Silk, Saeculi Noni, p..218).

Remigius also has recourse to the physico-moral interpretations of myth which we saw in the

work of the Pseudo-Heraclitus. Since Tityus is mentioned by Boethius, Remigius must tell who he is and why he was punished in hell by having vultures pluck at his liver eternally.

By Tityus is to be understood lustful men (*luxuriosi*). For the liver is the seat of lust just as the seat of laughter is the spleen and that of anger is the gall bladder. The liver of Tityus, therefore, is said to be eternally reborn, because lust once satisfied is not extinguished but marvelously . . . is rekindled. (Silk, Saeculi Noni, p. 219).

This is an explanation which would be helpful to the student trained in the Galenic physiology of the period and which at the same time makes the mythological Tityus into the more general vice of lust, as Ares was made the passion of anger by the Pseudo-Heraclitus.

In addition to such late antique methods, Remigius uses the peculiarly medieval device of etymological interpretation. Few reference works were available to the medieval student of classical texts, a fact which may in part explain the widespread practice of trying to derive the meanings of a myth from the names of its mythological characters. The main authorities for this technique were Fulgentius, an

African grammarian of the 6th century A.D., and St. Isidore of Seville. Fulgentius' Mitologiae interpreted ancient stories according to the Greek etymologies of their names, for example, "Orpheus from orea phone, that is best voice" (Mitol. III, 10, Helm, p. 77), while Isidore's encyclopaedia of all human knowledge, the Etymologiae, was based on the principle that the true nature of a thing could be gotten from its name. In the commentary printed by Silk, Remigius applies the etymological method not to the name Orpheus, but to other words such as Taenara, a name for the underworld, which he reads as Trenara. "Lamentations and sad songs are called Trenara, for trene in Greek is lamentation in Latin" (Silk, Saeculi Noni, p. 218).

Remigius' commentary is a straightforward, practical one, obviously intended for school use. His main concern is to use any means he can to clear up difficult passages and at the same time Christianize his pagan material. The commentator does not show a very high level of philosophical sophistication--for example he does not grasp the Platonism of Boethius' moralitas very well--but his text would have been

eminently suitable for use in a cathedral school and would certainly have helped to disseminate the Orpheus legend by making it accessible to the student and at the same time making it of contemporary importance.

Notker Labeo (d. 1022). Notker Labeo, nicknamed Notker the Lip to distinguish him from another Notker the Stammerer, wrote a work which, while not strictly a commentary on Boethius' Consolation, requires that he be included in our group of commentators. Notker was perhaps the first person to translate Martianus Capella and Boethius into Old High German. His translation of Boethius' meter on Orpheus is of interest to us partly because it shows the influence of Remigius, but even more because it uses a passage from the Bible to help explain the legend of Orpheus and Eurydice. Notker's method, in his translation, is to give several lines of the meter in Latin and then to translate them into German prose, sometimes expanding upon his original by a Latin gloss, sometimes expanding his German text.

Almost always his amplifications and explanations are intelligent, helpful and practical. His

concern is to help the reader rather than to display his classical erudition. He tells the student that when Boethius says "break the heavy chains of earth" he means "to conquer the burden of the flesh" (*sarcinam carnis vincere*).<sup>15</sup> Notker explains that Cerberus is the dog of hell and that when he is entranced it is by Orpheus' "new song" (p. 223, 22-3). Occasionally he supplies the reader with mythological matter external to the meter. The "arbiter of the shades" is Vulcan, and Pluto is "wealth" (p. 224, 20-1). He adds tags from Virgil, as well as proverbs, both Latin and German to explain and to amplify Boethius' discussion of the power of love, and he explains that when Boethius speaks in the *moralitas* of those who raise their minds to the day above, he is speaking of those who concentrate on God (p. 225, 8).

Notker follows the commentary of Remigius almost verbatim in several spots, both in his Latin, and in his German glosses. He speaks of those

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<sup>15</sup>Paul Piper ed. Die Schriften Notkers und Seiner Schule (Freiburg and Teubingen, 1882) I, 222, 22.

condemned to hell for following after temporalia as "sectatores" (p. 224, 5) while Remigius calls them "sectantes" (Silk, Saeculi Noni, p. 219). Notker supplies the same background information on the crime for which Tantalus was punished as did Remigius, though he adds his own moral to the fable: "A man can do no better than to taste God" (p. 224, 11-12). When reading of how the vultures ate the liver of Tityus, the student should be reminded, Notker says, that "the seat of lust is in the liver and once lust is satisfied, it is not extinguished, but rekindles again" (p. 224, 18-20). His words: "Quia libido cuius sedes est in iecore, semel expleta non extinguitur! sed recrudescit iterum" are identical to Remigius' explanation in the first clause and very similar in the second.

The most interesting part of Notker's translation of the meter on Orpheus is his last few words. He explains that Boethius' moral precept that the man who looks back loses all the good he has won is according to a passage in Luke 9:62. The evangelist says that "No man, having put his hand to the plough,



and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Notker's translation has the same pragmatic quality and moral insistence which we noted in Remigius. Again, it would seem as though Notker did his work for the use of students who knew little Latin. His concern is to make the meter live for the student--thus his use of proverbs and a biblical passage which would be part of the student's working vocabulary. If the Bible can supply a helpful explanation of a passage from pagan myth, why not use it, Notker might have said; after all it fixes both the biblical passage and the pagan legend more firmly in the student's mind.

Notker, like any intelligent, interested reader, brought to his reading whatever seemed applicable or parallel from his own background. Thus, for him to turn to a biblical statement which seemed to echo the moral stated by Boethius seems entirely natural. But as his own background did not include a familiarity with Boethius' late classical environment, and certainly did not include a knowledge of the philosophic tradition in which Boethius was writing, his

remarks, like those of many medieval authors, seem at two or three removes from the text, or have an air of having missed Boethius' point. This distance from the text, already noticeable in the Carolingian period, was to evolve into a veritable re-creation of texts--in the image of the medieval mind--in the work of the Platonist, William of Conches.

William of Conches (1080-1145). Between the very early 10th century and the 12th century, if we except the glosses of Notker Labeo, there was, to my knowledge, no new commentary on the Consolation of Philosophy. Instead, Remigius' work appears to have been the standard work used in the schools which taught Boethius as one of the auctores. During the 12th century, however, Remigius' commentary was gradually replaced by a new one written by William of Conches. William was associated with the cathedral school of Chartres, where that flourishing interest in classical literature known as the "12th century Renaissance" had its inception. Scholars at Chartres appear to have known more Greek than was common elsewhere in western Europe and they also seem to have worked

actively with Latin translations of Plato. One of their sources for Plato's thought was Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy.

William's interpretation of the twelfth meter of Book Three, while owing something to Remigius' commentary, was essentially a new work and drew on a wide variety of sources. Moreover, William's work, unlike that of his predecessors, was an extended commentary, rather than a series of glosses on difficult parts of the meter, focusing more directly on the moral meaning and less on the historical or mythological background.

William begins his commentary by outlining the moral meaning of the myth:

[Here is] the allegory (integumentum) of Orpheus. He [Boethius] proves that as long as the attention is occupied with temporal things, one can neither know nor delight in the highest good and this is revealed by the story of Orpheus.<sup>16</sup>

William, in contradistinction to Remigius and Notker, seizes immediately upon the point of the meter and

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<sup>16</sup>The text of William's commentary used here is that of MS Troyes 1381, printed in part by Edouard Jeuneau in his "Integumentum chez Guillaume de Conches" Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age XXXI (1957) Fol. 69r, p. 45.

the reason for its being in the Consolation at all. Like Pseudo-Heraclitus, Philo and Clement before him, William is both a Platonist and a defender of the text he is explaining. His use of the word "integumentum"--a term which in the Middle Ages meant something similar to allegory--makes a distinction at the outset between the outer covering, what we might call the plot of the Orpheus fable, and the nucleus or inner philosophical truth of it. William, who was much more interested in the philosophical meaning of his text than were Remigius and Notker, consciously employs the method of moral exegesis which we saw earlier in the Alexandrian Platonists. He sounds very much like the Pseudo-Heraclitus and Philo as he chides people who do not read fables allegorically.

At first, certain wise men, seeing the fable of Orpheus, wished to understand its allegory; nor was it believed of so perfect a philosopher, namely Boethius, that he would have placed anything superfluous or meaningless in such a perfect work. But our [modern] chattering magpies, knowing nothing of philosophy and therefore ignorant of the significance of allegory; being ashamed to say "I do not know" and seeking solace in their

ignorance, said that trying to expound this fable were a vain deceit . . . . We, however, are not like them, and it seems to us that we should explain this allegory. (Fol. 69r, p. 45)<sup>17</sup>

After this introduction, William proceeds in an orderly manner to tell the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, using the more Virgilian account with the story of Aristeus. His outline is concise but gives the whole story in a literal fashion. He concludes this section of his commentary: "First it is necessary to explain this allegory, then singly those things which are in the book" (Fol. 69v, p. 46). His commentary on the meaning of Orpheus' descent is sufficiently interesting to deserve being quoted in its entirety.

What does Orpheus represent? He stands for wisdom and eloquence and because of that he is called Oreaphone--that is, best voice. Eurydice is his wife--she is that

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<sup>17</sup> Compare with this view the following passage from the Pseudo-Heraclitus: "If there are certain men who, through ignorance, do not understand the allegorical language of Homer, and who do not know how to penetrate to the inmost reaches of his wisdom, who are obtuse and incapable of discerning the truth and reject it; who do not understand the philosophic sense of myth and concern themselves with the surface appearances of the fiction, let these men get out of our path." Ch.3.

natural concupiscence which is part of every one of us and no one can be without her--not even a child on the first day of its life. The poets imagine this human desire to be a kind of god or attendant spirit (genius) which is born and dies with every one. Genius is a natural desire and Eurydice is rightly named. She is the judgement of good (boni judicatio), because what every one thinks is good, whether it be so or not, he desires. This natural concupiscence or human desire, when it wandered through a field, was beloved by Aristeus. Aristeus stands for virtue, for ares is excellence. This excellence fell in love with Eurydice, that is, human desire, when she wandered through a meadow, that is, over the earth, which is sometimes green and sometimes dry. Aristeus loved her, that is, he followed her, because excellence always tries to raise human desire aloft from earthly things. But Eurydice fled Aristeus because desire struggles with virtue; wishing its own pleasure, which is contrary to the way of excellence. But then she died and descended to the underworld, that is, to earthly delights. His wife having died, Orpheus mourned, because when a wise man sees his attention and pleasure controlled by temporalia, he is displeased. Though he conquered all by his music, he did not conquer his grief for his lost wife, because however much a wise man overcomes the vices of others by his wisdom and eloquence, he cannot always withdraw his own desires from the grasp of temporalia and for this reason Orpheus greatly mourned. Then Orpheus descended to the underworld in order to bring back his wife, just as the wise man must descend to a knowledge of earthly things in order to see that there is nothing of

value in them before he can free himself from human desire. But one ought not, as Orpheus did, return to those things because "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Fol. 69v, p. 46)

It will be seen that this passage owes little to the commentary of Remigius. First, William applies the etymological method of interpretation to the names of Orpheus and Eurydice themselves, following Fulgentius in this. He sees in these names the moral qualities the characters are supposed to represent. The first part of his interpretation derives then from Fulgentius, but William goes much farther and in a different direction than the African grammarian had. William acknowledges his indebtedness to Fulgentius' Mitologiae but says that their explanations of the myth of Orpheus differ in many particulars.

If certain people who have read Fulgentius see that he has explained the fable of Orpheus in another way, they should not condemn our interpretation on this account, because, though treating of the same book, various authors arrive at different interpretations. (Fol. 69v, p. 47)

Remigius rarely acknowledged the sources he borrowed from and never suggested that there were many possible interpretations of a given myth which could have equal

validity. Another way in which William's commentary differs from that of his predecessor is in its espousal, again deriving from Fulgentius, of the primacy of the Artes. In the African's interpretation of the names of Orpheus and Eurydice--"Orpheus, that is, from orea phone or best voice and Eurydice, that is profound judgement" (loc. cit.), Fulgentius had wished to extoll the arts and to point out how they were to be found in the ancient stories. Fulgentius said that music, for example, was designated by the fable of Orpheus.

But William shows the power of the arts in relation to the soul of man. His concern is to dramatize in Platonic terms, the conflict between nous and thumos-epithumia which he perceives in the Consolation. Thus the fable of Orpheus, besides being an allegory of the Artes, becomes an allegory of the soul of man and of how the soul is affected by the Artes. And Orpheus and Eurydice thus embody the abstract components of the soul almost as allegorical characters stand for virtues and vices in a morality play or as Orgoglio and Timias both by their names and by



their actions stand for certain moral qualities in Spenser's Faery Queene. In William's commentary on the Consolation, as J. Hatinguais has noted, Orpheus and Eurydice, aided by the power of music and eloquence, appear in "a drama of knowledge and will which move confusedly but invincibly towards the Good."<sup>18</sup> William it is interesting to note, makes no attempt to place the legend in a Christian context; though the Platonism of Boethius and William is not antithetical to Christianity, the commentator explains the myth in purely Platonic, even humanistic terms, excepting the closing of the story by the moral tag from Luke, which he may have got from Notker.

By the 12th century, William's commentary, owing to the great interest in Platonism, and hence in Boethius as a Latin transmitter of it, had replaced the commentary of Remigius and had become the more or less official school commentary (Étude, pp. 78-91) just as Boethius had become one of the official auctores of the schools. An auctor in the Middle Ages

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<sup>18</sup>J. Hatinguais, "En Marge d'un Poème de Boèce: l'Interprétation Allégorique du Mythe d'Orphée par Guillaume de Conches," Association Guillaume Budé: Congrès de Tours et Poitiers (September, 1953), p. 286.

was a man who was considered an authority in the kind of literature he wrote and a model to be imitated both for style and substance. A list compiled by Conrad of Hirsau gives some of the auctores who were taught in the schools of his day. It included Donatus, Cato, Aesop, Avianus, Sedulius, Juvenius, Prosper, Theodulus, Arator, Prudentius, Cicero, Sallust, Lucan, Horace, Ovid, Juvenal, the Latin Homer, Persius, Statius, Virgil, and Boethius.<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note that some of these authors are men we would call "classical" and might think worthy of imitation; others are late antique or early medieval writers whose only apparent value seems to be their espousal of Christian doctrine, but to the Middle Ages they were venerandi: men to be revered and imitated.

An auctor like Boethius would have been studied in the 12th century somewhat like this. First, the master would go over an accessus ad auctores, a kind of outline sometimes incorporated in manuscripts of classical authors in the Middle Ages. The accessus

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<sup>19</sup> Dialogus super Auctores sive Didascalion, ed. G. Scheppss (Wurtzburg, 1889).

was concerned with such matters as the author's life --this is why many Boethius MSS have a Vita Boetii at the beginning--, why the author's work was titled as it was, the reason the author wrote the work, what the student could learn from it, and what parts were philosophical. Such schema were commonly used to give the students a short and memorable handle to a long and complex work--rather like a modern plot outline for King Lear--being dictated to the students by the master so that each member of the class could have such an accessus for each author studied.<sup>20</sup>

After the accessus, the lectio or general discussion of the work usually followed. The teacher explained and interpreted (expositio) the work for the pupils. There were three sorts of expositiones, 1) according to the word (littera) 2) according to the evident or narrative meaning (sensus) and 3)

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<sup>20</sup> See Edwin Quain, "Medieval Accessus ad Auctores" Traditio (1954). See also G. Paré et al., La Renaissance du XIIe Siècle: Les Écoles et Enseignement (Paris and Ottawa, 1933), p. 99f. Servius, in the preface to his exposition of the Aeneid says that we should consider the following points when interpreting an author: his life, the title of the work, the genre, the intention, the number of books and their order.

according to the spiritual or philosophical meaning (sententia).<sup>21</sup> William's commentary on the twelfth meter of Book Three is, of course, an example of the lectio ad sententiam, for as he sees it, the meter teaches philosophy and needs to be interpreted spiritually rather than grammatically or narratively.

By his reverence for Boethius as a classical author and by his attempt to come to terms with Boethius' thought William shows himself to be writing in the humanistic tradition of the school of Chartres. He sees in this meter an ethical lesson, spending very little time on matters which interested Remigius and Notker and much on matters which they were not equipped to handle. His commentary is a sustained, imaginative interpretation, of considerable worth in its own right and certainly close to the Platonic ideas of conduct which Boethius was trying to express. In William's commentary, secular and pagan philosophy

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<sup>21</sup>Hugh of St. Victor, in his manual on the art of teaching, explains this system clearly. "Expositio tria continet: litteram, sensum, sententiam. Littera est congrua ordinatio dictionem, quam etiam constructionem vocamus. Sensus est facilis quaedam et aperta significatio . . . Sententia est profundior intelligentia." Didascalion III, 9, PL 176, 771.

have as high a place as, perhaps, the precepts of the biblical prophets.

Nicholas Trivet (d. 1334). This author commented on the Consolation some time before 1307,<sup>22</sup> and his work, judging from the number of extant manuscripts, became perhaps the most widely known of Boethius commentaries. Nicholas used much of William's work, though without giving credit to his source, and he does not always seem to have understood William very well. He is less interested in explaining the sententia of the Orpheus meter than in writing a school gloss. His work is of interest to us mainly for its influence on Robert Henryson's poem "Orpheus and Eurydice." Beryl Smalley tells us that Trivet was the son of a knight, a student at Oxford, and a Dominican.<sup>23</sup> Apparently he was a very industrious man, as he wrote commentaries on Virgil, St. Augustine's City of God, Livy, Cicero, Seneca's plays, Juvenal and Boethius.

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<sup>22</sup>Courcelle, "Étude," p. 97.

<sup>23</sup>Beryl Smalley, English Friars and Antiquity in the Early Fourteenth Century (Oxford, 1960), pp. 58-59.

Trivet's commentary on the Orpheus meter in the Consolation is quite long, but much of it is taken up with the explanation of the topography of the underworld and other matters which do not directly concern Orpheus. In the main, Trivet's explanation of the fable derives from William of Conches.

By Orpheus we should understand the part of the intellect which is instructed in wisdom and intelligence; whence he is said to be the son of Phoebus and Calliope, who is one of the Nine Muses, so called from calo, that is beautiful . . . sound because she represents eloquence . . . and Phoebus, the god of wisdom, because he instructed Orpheus in wisdom. Orpheus, however, by his sweet lyre, that is his eloquence, led men from brute ways to civilization . . . . Eurydice is his wife--that is the passional side (pars affectiva) which desires to join with him. By Aristeus we should understand Virtue. But Eurydice, as she fled through the meadow, that is the folly of present life, trod on a serpent, not crushing it but casting herself down, that is joining herself to the sensuality by which she is bitten, and dies. Thus Orpheus descends to hell, that is gives himself over to earthly cares. Orpheus, that is the intellect, thought to carry her off by beautiful music which would appease the gods--for by sweet eloquence joined to wisdom one ascends to heaven. Such an ascent was difficult, however, for she must be drawn up through the many delights which impede virtue when it would ascend. Thus Virgil: "To recall thy steps

and pass out to the upper air, this is the task, this is the toil. Some few, whom kindly Jupiter has loved or shining worth uplifted to heaven, sons of the gods, have availed (Aen. VI, 128-131).<sup>24</sup>

Though much of this passage simply copies William, there are some interesting additions by Nicholas himself. If William represented Plato in commenting on Boethius, Trivet represents Aristotle. He is not very interested in myth for its own sake and advances the rationalist explanation of Orpheus as a civilizing force which we saw in the Remigius commentary. For Nicholas, the philosophical validity of the myth is to be found in its foreshadowing of the power of the Artes--particularly as it deals with sapientia et eloquentia, the powers by which Orpheus hoped to triumph over the gods of the underworld. Though Trivet looks at the myth as a scholastic might, there are traces of humanist interest in his interpretation. He has a humanist's desire to display classical erudition. The famous tag from Virgil which Nicholas brings to the story of Orpheus

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<sup>24</sup> My translation of Trivet's commentary is based on the text of B. N. Lat. 18424, Fol. 101 r/v.

--and which he would naturally think of as he had written a commentary on the Aeneid--allows him to talk about one classical story in terms of another, bringing together Aeneas and Orpheus as two voyagers to the underworld. Excepting a brief reference to Virgil in Notker's translation of the meter, the only other medieval writer to connect Orpheus and Aeneas in this way is the 14th-century Italian humanist Albertino Mussato.<sup>25</sup> Also of note is Nicholas' use of the idea of an ascensus as well as a descensus. Orpheus and the power of his lyre to draw the soul to the heavens were mentioned in the work Lyra referred to by Varro and discussed earlier, but the idea is not a popular one in medieval discussions of Orpheus, and only in Henryson's "Orpheus and Eurydice" is much capital made of it.

Aside from these points, however, Nicholas' work is rather dull, more of a school gloss than an extended commentary. The ending of his discussion of the Boethian moralitas is simply a paraphrase rather than an interpretation.

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<sup>25</sup> See Epistola IX in Opera (Venice, 1635), p. 57.



Then when he says this fable applies to you he means that whoever has acquired good by means of wisdom loses it when he sees hell, that is when his attention is fixed on earth and on temporal things which are lowly. (Fol. 102v)

A commentary on Boethius, indebted to Trivet and often, though incorrectly, attributed to Thomas Aquinas, deserves to be mentioned here. This work is in part a slavish imitation of Trivet and uses his very words, but more generally is the most primitive kind of school commentary or prose paraphrase. The author sees nothing of interest in the Orpheus legend, but takes advantage of the meter to make use of Aristotle in explaining Boethius' view of the soul. I have not seen Aristotle used directly in other commentaries on the meter. The commentary in question is probably of 15th-century origin.<sup>26</sup>

Italian and French Commentators. There are a number of Italian and French translators of the Consolation of Philosophy who are of varying interest

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<sup>26</sup>The commentary may be found in Boetius De Philosophico Consolatu . . . cum Figuris Ornatissimis Noviter Expolitus (Johannes Gruniger, Strasbourg, 1501), fol. LXXXIII r/v, where it is attributed to Aquinas. Kate O. Petersen, "Chaucer and Trivet," PMLA XVIII (1903), discusses the dating of the pseudo-Aquinas commentary.

for the study of medieval views of the Orpheus meter. Adding material to their translations, some of these men follow Fulgentius, some Trivet, some William of Conches.<sup>27</sup> A few examples should suffice to show the nature of such additions. The Italians follow Trivet very closely, reducing his long commentary to easily memorable interpretations. One of the translators says that Orpheus is "la parte intellectiva dell'uomo amestrata dala sapientia et dala eloquentia," while Eurydice is "parte effectiva [sic]" (Cod. Ricc. 1540, Fol. 69r/v). With minor differences in wording, the other translator repeats this explanation, adding that Aristeus is "virtue" (B. N. Ital. 439, Fol. 68r/v).

About 1285 an anonymous writer associated with the translation of Boethius by Jean de Meun was much intrigued with the Orpheus meter, translating its verses into very literal French and explaining them morally. Much of his interpretative material, for

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<sup>27</sup> The interested reader is directed to the thorough study of the French translators by A. Thomas and M. Roques, "Traductions Francaises de la Consolation Philosophiae de Boèce," Histoire Littéraire de la France XXXVII (1938).

example his discussion of Ixion, he draws from Fulgentius. When he comes to the mention of Orpheus by name, he develops the Fulgentian allegory of the Artes.

. . . Fabius Planciades [Fulgentius said]  
 . . . this fable of Orpheus involves song  
 and the art of music . . . thanks to  
 music, the passions of wild beasts are  
 gentled.<sup>28</sup>

He follows Trivet in using Aeneas' adventures in Hades as explanatory material (fol. 48b) and is not above a little concern for maisterye:

Thus, it seems to me, Orpheus and Eurydice  
 bring themselves together by marriage, as  
 when beautiful voices are harmonious together,  
 reason and judgment are in tune  
 when the husband is Orpheus. (Fol. 48 r/v)

All told, this anonymous writer manages to expand the 58 lines of Boethius' meter into 1238 of his own.

Another anonymous author translates William's explanation directly into his French version of Boethius:

Orpheus est homme sage et bien parlant.  
 Eurydice est naturele concupiscence qui  
 a chacun tant comme il vit naturelement  
 et sans department est coniointe. Aris-

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<sup>28</sup>Text in B. N. Fr. 576, Fol. 48c.

teus est la vertu divine. (B. N. Fr. 575, Fol. 69r).

But the most interesting of these translators is Peter of Paris, who wrote his version of the Consolation about 1309.<sup>29</sup> Peter is of importance to us primarily because some of his unlearned elaborations of the Orpheus legend show the increase of romance elements in the legend, as more and more writers try to explain it in terms of medieval interests.

He tells in the fable of a man who is called Orpheus, and he was the son of a goddess who was a great enchantress and this goddess was called Calliope. This Calliope lived near a beautiful fountain and she taught her son Orpheus to sing and he became one of the best singers in the world. And thus, as a certain author tells us in the Histories [Metamorphoses?], he sang so beautifully that the trees danced and moved to his song. (pp. 69-70)

Peter goes on with the story from Ovid for a time and then adds the startling information that Orpheus' wife became such a shrew that he killed her and then pined for her and sought her in hell (pp. 69-70). He gives the standard Virgilian and Ovidian explanatory glosses of Boethius' story, after which he explains

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<sup>29</sup> This translation and commentary has been edited by Antoine Thomas, "Notice sur le Manuscrit Latin 4788 du Vatican Contenant une Traduction Francaise, avec Commentaire per Maître Pierre de Paris," Notices et Extraits de la Bibliothèque Nationale XLI (1923).

that the gods of the underworld were enchanted by Orpheus' singing and agreed to let him have his wife "Urrices" but decreed that he would be blind forever. Orpheus, in spite of this misfortune, appears to lead his wife away from the underworld successfully, and Peter finishes the tale with an explanation of Boethius' moralitas.<sup>30</sup>

Commentators on the Metamorphoses  
of Ovid

If the Consolation of Boethius was the main source for the Middle Ages of Antique philosophy, the Metamorphoses of Ovid provided the Middle Ages with its richest treasurehouse of classical legend.

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<sup>30</sup>Other additions and comparisons of a very un-Boethian nature begin to appear in the legend about this time. In the Conches manuscript discussed above there is an interesting anonymous gloss, "read here that you should not look back, for if you look back you will lose the best, just as Orpheus did and just as you would censure Lot's wife" (Fol. 39r).

Dionysius explains that according "to the spiritual explanation, by Orpheus the son of Apollo we should understand any wise Christian. . . . regenerated by baptism he becomes a servant of God,

Owing to clerical hostility towards Ovid as the writer of licentious tales, as well as to the difficulty and sophistication of his verse and subject matter, there seems to have been little knowledge of, or interest in, Ovid from late antiquity through the early Middle Ages. He became an accepted auctor in the schools during the 12th century,<sup>31</sup> and his subsequent rise in popularity paralleled the growing interest of the times in a secular literature of amusement. By the 14th century his influence on both Latin and vernacular literature had equalled, if not surpassed, that of Boethius, and judging only from the number of Ovid commentaries written, this popularity was not to wane until well into the 17th century, if ever.

Just as we saw a desire to make Boethius a medieval author--concerned with the things which a

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to whom he leads his wife, that is his own flesh and its innate concupiscence, perpetually joined to it . . . ." (Dionysii Cartusiani Opera Omnia (Tornaci, 1906) XXXIV, p. 431.

<sup>31</sup>Ovid's Metamorphoses and other poems are mentioned as school texts in the curricula of Conrad of Hirsau (c. 1150), Alexander Neckham (c. 1175) and Eberhardt the German (c. 1250). For a complete list of such curricula see E. R. Curtius, European Literature in the Latin Middle Ages, English ed. (New York, 1953), pp. 49-50.

man of the 13th century might reasonably be interested in--Ovid, too, was dressed in medieval clothes, though generally in art more than in literature. His myths were explained, allegorically or otherwise, to make them accord with medieval ideas, and even his name, Ovidius Naso, was subjected to the etymological method of interpretation: he was called Naso "ex nasonis"--because he had a big nose.

Commentators on the Consolation of Boethius explained the allusions to Orpheus and to other classical figures incidentally; they were mainly concerned with the ethics or philosophy of the work. Commentators on the Metamorphoses, however, dealt specifically with mythology and were very little concerned with the Pythagoreanism, for example, of the first and last books of the poem. While men of the 12th century had no trouble imagining demons, spirits, and other supernatural beings in medieval dress, they were a bit more suspicious of the existence of these beings in antiquity. The Euhemerist commentator might "explain" the marvellous deeds of the gods by pointing out that they could be described in human terms which

were, therefore, much more credible. Thus Vulcan was simply a man deified or regarded as a god because he was the inventor of fire and metal-working. Some commentators took a more allegorical view of the fables and tried to indicate that Ovid, consciously or unconsciously, was presenting Christian doctrine in pagan disguise, and that once the Christian significance of the fables was determined, the pious student or other reader could profit from them. In Ovid's poem were to be found a variety of fables of sufficient indecorum to challenge the ingenuity of the most resourceful expositor. By the 12th century, several strains of explanation for them had been developed.<sup>32</sup>

Since Ovid was not commented upon, as nearly as we can tell, until the 12th century, the early authors who wrote explanations of the Metamorphoses could not refer to similar works in compiling their own, and would have had to use other classical commentaries for reference material on pagan myth.

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<sup>32</sup>For a handlist and discussion of these strains in the Ovid commentaries see L. K. Born, "Ovid and Allegory," Speculum IX (1934), as well as the articles by J. D. Cooke, "Euhemerism: A Medieval Interpretation of Classical Paganism," Speculum II (1927), and Fausto Ghisalberti, "L'Ovidius Moralizatus di P. Bersuire," Studi Romanzi XXIII (1933), 46 ff.



Probably the oldest fully developed mythographic commentaries they could use were those on Martianus, which we shall discuss later, and those on Boethius. In examining the way in which people explained the Metamorphoses, we shall see that most of these commentators, in one way or another, were indebted to the already existing commentaries on Boethius, and in the case of Orpheus indebted as well to Boethius' treatment of his legend.

Boethius and Ovid seem naturally to fall together in our study of Orpheus in the Middle Ages, since Boethius was following, in the main, the account of Orpheus presented in the Metamorphoses. There, the reader will recall, the story of Orpheus was told in its entirety, differing from the Virgilian treatment only in that there was no mention made of Aristaeus and that the sad goodbyes of Orpheus and Eurydice are not so much emphasized as they are in Virgil. A medieval reader, then, would have pretty much the whole story of Orpheus and Eurydice when he read the Metamorphoses, and he would have the story in a context which emphasized the love interest of the legend.

Thus it is only natural to see certain traces of the romance strain of the Orpheus legend turning up in Ovid commentaries as well--there are the same elaborations and introduction of extraneous or biblical material as we noted in the Boethius commentaries, and traces of the exaltation of Eurydice.

The medieval commentators on the Metamorphoses who wrote between the 12th and 14th centuries were Arnulphus of Orléans, John of Garland, Giovanni del Virgilio, the authors of the Ovide Moralisé in prose and verse, and Peter Bersuire. These authors helped to fill in the portrait of Orpheus most importantly by adding material from the Bible or from religious life. It is perhaps ironic that Orpheus' appearance in Ovid--probably his most pagan presentation to the Middle Ages--should be subject to the most concentrated efforts at Christian explanation, and in the medieval Ovid commentaries we find the first direct identification of Orpheus with Christ.

Arnulphus of Orléans. The oldest of the Ovid commentaries of which I am aware is by Arnulphus of

Orléans (c. 1125).<sup>33</sup> It is conventional in structure, being a set of straightforward explanatory glosses on the individual fables. The section on the Orpheus legend contains little original material and much that is familiar to us from the commentaries of Remigius and William of Conches on Boethius. Arnulphus' overall concern with the Artes and with Orpheus' power of eloquence suggests, as well, that he had been reading Fulgentius. While to us the commentary may seem less valuable for being a compendium of other men's words, to the medieval reader the presence of authorities from the past lent weight to a contemporary document. There was, as should be clear by now, a considerable amount of borrowing among medieval commentators, most of it unacknowledged.

The schoolmaster Arnulphus does add some new material to the Orpheus legend, of an allegorical nature. When Ovid speaks of mountains as the places to which Orpheus retired in grief, Arnulphus explains that these are the virtues to which he ascended, just

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<sup>33</sup> This commentary has been edited by Fausto Ghisalberti, "Arnolfo d'Orléans, un Cultore di Ovidio nel Secolo XII," Memorie de Reale Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere XXIV (1932).

as he descended to vices when he went after Eurydice. He also explains that the Thracian women killed Orpheus when he would not consort with them because women are by nature inclined towards lust and vice.

Perhaps the most interesting thing in Arnulphus' work is the gloss added by a later hand to the manuscript edited by Ghisalberti. The man who wrote this marginal note evidently did not find Arnulphus' explanation of Orpheus sufficiently Christian for his taste, for he says:

Orpheus is a type of Christ, who out of his own goodness provided a wife for himself . . . but through the teeth of the serpent, that is, by the counsel of the devil . . . lost her. (p. 222)

John of Garland. In the Middle Ages, as now, one of the more effective ways to get students to memorize information was to cast it in the form of verses. The collections of Middle English Lyrics have many examples of these mnemonic verses; one that has survived to our own time is the list of the months beginning "thirty days hath September." John of Garland, who wrote an Integumenta Ovidii about 1234, put

his commentary in verse which would allow the student to remember easily both the outline of the Ovidian fables and their allegorical explanations. His couplet on Orpheus reads:

De Orpheo: Field is Pleasure: Wife is  
Flesh: Viper is Poison/ Strength is Reason:  
Styx is Earth: Lyre is Speech.<sup>34</sup>

In an Ovid manuscript (Ambrosiana N. 254 Supp.) which contains John's explanatory couplet, John's words are explained and expanded by a reader or owner of the manuscript.

By Orpheus we are to understand the man who has discretion and who has a wife, that is sensuality, who wanders through a field, that is through the world which they quickly traverse. She was killed by a serpent, that is by the fragility of her sex . . . . When Orpheus summons the trees with his song, we should understand foolish men, and by his lyre the speech which teaches them, and all of this is what these two verses mean. (p. 67)

John's device of gnomic verse was to be used with increasing frequency by the emblem writers of the 16th century.

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<sup>34</sup> Integumenta Ovidii, ed. Fausto Ghisalberti (Milan, 1933) X, p. 67. Note that the word "integument" was made popular in commentaries on the Orpheus legend by William of Conches, whose commentary John seems to follow.

Giovanni del Virgilio. The Italian commentator Giovanni del Virgilio wrote an explanation of the Metamorphoses about 1325, of which one complete manuscript and seven fragments survive. We know that in 1321 Giovanni was authorized to give a course on Virgil, Statius, Lucan, and Ovid at Bologna and he may have written his Ovid commentary for class use. The Expositio is a series of Latin paraphrases, verse and prose, which, while adding Christian overtones to Ovid's fables, remain in certain ways separate narratives. Giovanni does not allegorize the text he works with so much as expand it, taking up the elaborations which had been growing increasingly common among the medieval commentators, and incorporating them into his own narrative paraphrase. Giovanni's commentary, like the nearly contemporary French moralized Ovid in prose, develops a romance-like narrative out of what, in earlier authors, was merely scholia:

Orpheus was the wisest and most eloquent of men, and on this account was thought to be the son of Apollo, the god of Wisdom, and of Calliope, the Muse of Eloquence. Orpheus took Eurydice for a wife--she should be understood as profound judgement and he had taken her because she judged profoundly.

But when profound judgement wandered through a field, that is, when she delighted in worldly things, Aristeus--the devil--killed her, because the devil drew her from the good path. Orpheus, seeing then that he had lost profound truth, began to praise God humbly, and his wife was returned to him on the condition that he not look back at her before they reached the gates of Hell, that is, not to succumb to temptation, but he broke this law and accordingly lost her. On this account Orpheus renounced Hell, that is temptation, and reconciling himself to God began to spurn women--giving his soul instead to God--and began to love men, that is, to act in a manly way, on which account he was dead to the delights of the world; for truly, such men [cloistered religious?] are dead to the world; and thus he truly had Eurydice back--that is profound judgement.<sup>35</sup>

Giovanni makes of Ovid's story a moral exemplum almost like a saint's life. For him, the story tells the Christian to renounce the world and turn to God. Orpheus becomes a monk. Moreover, this interpretation actually derives from Giovanni's imaginative handling of one of the most thorny points in Ovid's fable of Orpheus. It will be recalled that, according to Ovid, Orpheus had for three years after the death of his wife shunned women, "giving his love

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<sup>35</sup> Giovanni del Virgilio, Expositio Metamorphosis, in Fausto Ghisalberti "Giovanni del Virgilio Espositore delle Metamorphosi," Il Giornale Dantesco, XXXIV (1931), p. 89.

to tender boys" (Met. X, 83-84). This detail is one which most of the antique and medieval interpreters of the legend refrained from discussing; yet Giovanni builds a Christian tale of renunciation from it. In short, Giovanni has not so much interpreted Orpheus' legend for the use of Christians as seen in the legend an entirely new story and one which is interesting in its own right. After the prose interpretation, lest the student forget Giovanni's interpretation, he offers a mnemonic verse summary of the story which is rather similar in style to the distich of John of Garland.

In Arnulphus of Orléans' gloss and in Giovanni's exposition one can see an increasing interest in synchronizing the life of Orpheus with the life and teachings of Christ. This interest dominates the treatment of Orpheus in two 14th century works, the prose Ovide Moralisé and the Metamorphosis Ovidiana of Pierre Bersuire. In these two works we find the first direct and attributable identification of Orpheus with Christ in medieval literature.

The Ovide Moralisé. The prose Ovide Moralisé, a long work which translates the fables of Ovid into



French and appends to each a moralitas, gives this view of Orpheus:

. . . by Orpheus and by his harp we must understand the person of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . who played his harp so melodiously that he drew from Hell the sainted souls of the Holy Fathers who had descended there because of the sins of Adam and Eve.<sup>36</sup>

In this passage not only have Christ and Orpheus been identified with each other, but Christ has assumed the lyre of Orpheus. The cross traditionally carried by Christ in the harrowing of hell is not, however, so dissimilar from the lyre which supplants it, either in visual appearance or in symbolic meaning. Orpheus' lyre, as we have seen, had been interpreted as the way in which the Logos manifested itself in sound, and was also, like the cross, seen as a figure for the universe itself. Christian symbolism of the cross as a figure for the universe derives from the

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<sup>36</sup>C. de Boer, ed., Ovide Moralisé en Prose (Amsterdam, 1954), p. 264. A somewhat similar version of the work in verse has also been edited by de Boer, Ovide Moralizé (Amsterdam, 1915-1938). The versified version gives a fairly conventional Boethian moralitas: "don't look back or you lose everything" (IV, 23). For a discussion of these works see J. Engles, Études sur L'Ovide Moralisé (Groningen, 1943) and Born, op. cit.

idea of the Greek letter X as a cosmic figure in the Timaeus. Irenaeus saw the four points of the cross as symbolizing the length and breadth, height and depth of the world (Epid. I, 34); like the seven strings of Orpheus' lyre which symbolized the consonances of the spheres, "the sign of the wooden cross holds the machinery of the firmament together, strengthens the buttresses of the world and helps those who cling to it to achieve eternity," according to Firmicus Maternus (De Err. Prof. Reliq., 27, CSEL, 2, p. 121). The many points of comparison between the descent of Orpheus and Christ's descent to Hell as detailed in the Gospel of Nicodemus make all the more natural this linking of Christ's cross and its magical power over the King of Hell with Orpheus' lyre and its power over the gods of the underworld.

Pierre Bersuire. Probably the most remarkable and inventive of the medieval commentators on the Metamorphoses was the Benedictine Pierre Bersuire (d. 1356), who wrote a work called the Metamorphosis

Ovidiana. This work, which was long thought to be the work of Thomas Walleys, is now known to be the fifteenth book of Bersuire's great moralized encyclopedia, the Reductorium Morale.<sup>37</sup>

Bersuire interprets morally each fable in the Metamorphoses. He begins his explanation by presenting a straightforward paraphrase of the fable, setting out the main events in their natural order. Then he goes on to explain the fable, often giving several different views of it. He opens the discussion of the Orpheus legend as follows:

Let us speak allegorically and say that Orpheus, the child of the [sun], is Christ the son of God the Father, because he leads Eurydice, that is the human soul, to the Father through charity and love. And Christ joined her to himself through a special Prerogative from the Father. Truly, the Devil,

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<sup>37</sup>A concise discussion of Bersuire's life is to be found in Beryl Smalley, English Friars and Antiquity, pp. 261-64. Accounts of the various manuscripts and editions of the Reductorium Morale may be found in F. Stegmüller, Repertorium Biblicum IV, 235 ff. On the question of Bersuire's authorship of the Metamorphosis Ovidiana see B. Haureau, "Mémoire sur un Commentaire des Metamorphosis d'Ovide," Mémoires de L'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres XXX (1883), pp. 49-50.

creeping like a Serpent, drew near the new bride, that is, created de novo, while she collected flowers, that is while she seized the forbidden apple, and stung her by temptation and killed her by sin, and finally she went to the world below. Seeing this, Christ-Orpheus wished himself to descend to the lower world and thus he retook his wife, that is human nature, ripping her from the hands of the ruler of Hell himself; and he led her with him to the upper world, saying this verse from Canticles 2:10 'Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away.'<sup>38</sup>

Here Bersuire sees the whole of the Fall and the Redemption of man in the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. The divinely skilled song which swayed the gods in Ovid's account becomes the New Song with which Christ calls to the Church to join him in marriage.

Intent on offering a number of possible interpretations, Bersuire next presents a contrasting and somewhat less favorable view of Orpheus.

Or let us say that Orpheus is a sinner who, by the bite of the serpent, that is by the temptation of the Devil, lost his wife, that is his soul, when she was indiscreetly collecting flowers, that is applying her mind to the flux of temporalia. But he recovered her spiritually,

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<sup>38</sup> Metamorphosis Ovidiana . . . Moraliter Explanata (Paris, 1509), Fol. LXXVIII, Sig. K. "Child of the sun" is my conjecture. The text reads folis, leaf, or poetically, a Sibyl, but the compositor must have taken f for long s.

because he descended to the lower world through thought and through the power of his sweet measured words. Fear alone of infernal punishment made him penitent for his sins and thus he regained his wife through grace . . . . Truly many are there who look backward through a love of temporalia just as a dog returns to his vomit, and they love their wife too much, that is the recovered soul, and so they favor their concupiscence and return the eyes of their mind to it and so they put her by and Hell receives her again. So says John 12:25, 'who loves his soul loses it.' (Fol. LXXIII, r. Sig. K)

Here Bersuire echoes St. Augustine both in the metaphor "the eyes of their minds" and, more important, in the idea of the descent in humility, which occurs in many Augustinian texts, for example "first descend that you may ascend to God" (Conf. IV, xii). By this approach he makes of the Orpheus myth a moral exemplum rather than an allegory. Bersuire evidently wishes to present a number of exempla based on the myth--a number of Christian perspectives from which the story may be viewed profitably. As he continues to offer these perspectives, however, he departs completely from any existing tradition of Orpheus interpretation and becomes almost purely the Christian moralist, no longer giving any overall meaning to the

legend but trying to make each detail suggest an improving idea.

Skipping over his treatment of the manner of Orpheus' death, we come to this curious statement by the commentator, which he does not preface by his usual "let us say allegorically."

Orpheus signifies the preacher and teacher of the divine song, who, coming from Hell, that is the world, must sit in the mountains of Scripture and religion and sing the songs and melodies of sacred Scripture, and call to himself, that is to the state of penitence or faith, trees and stones, that is the insensible and hardened sinners, and from them, by the sweetness of the divine word, to bring together the people. And he ought to flee the embrace of women . . .

Or let us say that Orpheus signifies the saints and doctors of the primitive church and by the sweetness of his song, that is preaching, called to the faith of the Church, stones, that is hard hearts, and trees, that is insensible and infidel men. (Fol. LXXII v. Sig. K 1)

Because Bersuire is not so much interested in explaining Ovid as in plying the text with an arsenal of Christian interpretations, his commentary leads the reader to perhaps the farthest remove from the text he has as yet been brought. Further on in this commentary the Thracian women who killed Orpheus become,

in Bersuire's hands, cruel princes and tyrants who murder the early martyrs. Bersuire does not hold any specific point of view about the allegorical meaning of Ovid's fables, nor does he doggedly rely on the ideas of earlier commentaries, though he does follow Giovanni del Virgilio rather closely in his interpretation of Orpheus. Wishing to make the story of Orpheus as useful as possible to the Christian, he identifies Orpheus with Christ, but we feel that just as important to Bersuire was the making of Christ's deeds more universal by showing how yet another classical story, that is the myth of Orpheus, prefigured them.

Bersuire's work is so little dependent on the original fables of Ovid that, in effect, it is not a commentary at all, but a separate anthology. Bersuire has thoroughly medievalized his pagan material, as indeed John and Giovanni with their verses on Orpheus had been doing in their own way. The Ovid commentary, lending itself particularly well to such treatment, has by the 14th century evolved into a set of Christian and peculiarly medieval narratives,

needing only an index and introduction on the worship of the pagan gods in general to make it a separate work of reference. For any person wishing to read or to write literature containing mythological allusions, a work such as the Metamorphosis Ovidiana would provide a ready handbook of classical legend, all rendered into acceptable Christian versions. In such a commentary we see a forerunner of the mythographic handbook.

### The Mythographic Tradition

Although many features of the Ovid commentaries are manifest in the mythographic handbooks, we must look farther back for the sources of the mythographic tradition. Two early medieval works, the Mitologiae of Fulgentius and the De Nuptiis of Martianus Capella, may properly be called the progenitors of a long line of commentaries which was to produce, by the middle of the 14th century, Boccaccio's Genealogiae Deorum Gentilium and Coluccio Salutati's De Laboribus Herculis.



Both Fulgentius and Martianus were grammarians, interested primarily in the arts; for them classical myths were meaningful in so far as they explained and prefigured allegorically the seven liberal arts. Fulgentius on the one hand, wrote an elaborate reference work providing physical, etymological and moral explanations for most of the Greek myths. His manner of proceeding, using the etymological and moral explanation together, reminds one of the Pseudo-Heraclitus--for example, he says that Paris, compelled to choose the most beautiful of the three goddesses, was really choosing among symbols for the active, contemplative and erotic life (II, i). Martianus, on the other hand, wrote a long poem in which he personified the seven liberal arts and arranged a marriage in heaven between Mercury and Philology. All of this was accompanied by extensive cosmological learning. He saw in the loves and deeds of the classical gods, many of whom were connected with particular planets as were the arts, prefigurations or ethical parallels to the relations of the medieval Artes.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See the fine article on Martianus, his difficulties and his commentators by William H. Stahl, "To a Better Understanding of Martianus Capella," Speculum XL (1965), p. 102 ff.

Fulgentius was a more straightforward expository author, whose work was as easily comprehensible to a well-educated 14th century reader as it was to a 6th. But Martianus grew increasingly difficult with the passage of time. His style was obtuse and his work presupposed extensive familiarity with Latin culture, yet even at the time Martianus wrote his poem, the gods and goddesses of Rome had ceased to be known as part of a state cult and were on their way to becoming the mere objects of antiquarian research. Classical mythology was no longer a part of religion in the 6th century A.D., and Martianus' references even to its most familiar figures grew more obscure as the place which pagan deities had once occupied in the public mind was repopled by Christian historical figures. Not surprisingly, therefore, commentaries came to be written in the Carolingian period on the poem of Martianus, explaining his allusions to myth. But unlike the Boethius commentaries, however, which had been grammatical, metrical, stylistic, philosophical, historical and mythological, the Martianus commentaries were

primarily scientific and mythological, having been conceived simply as a means of making clear what was going on at the literal level in the De Nuptuiis.

Among the authors of these commentaries were Remigius, Johannes Scotus, Martin of Laon and Notker --men whose interests were classical and in certain ways humanistic rather than primarily moralistic. They saw great value in Greek and Roman learning and wanted to make it available to men of their own age; as a consequence, early commentaries on Martianus tend to be of secular interest. Though they were written by clerics, these commentaries were not much concerned to show the evils of the pagan gods or the stupidity of eminent pagans in not accepting Christianity. Their dependence on Fulgentius as a source of information on classical myth shows up in the tendency of these early commentaries to extoll poetry and the Artes generally and to give more information about Plato than Paul. They are not always very accurate, but they do focus on the work to be explained. Martin of Laon's note on Orpheus is typical of these Carolingian commentaries.

In explaining a reference to Orpheus and Aristoxenus, Plato and Archimedes, in the De Nuptuiis, Martin says

Orpheus and Aristoxenus were lyre players;  
Plato and Archimedes were astrologers who  
disputed about the motions of the seven  
planets.<sup>40</sup>

Other commentaries tended to stress the story of Orpheus as a figure for the Artes, particularly rhetoric, eloquence, and music.

The purely informational content of the Carolingian commentaries on Martianus, though in brief compass, relates them to the great medieval encyclopedias of human knowledge compiled by such writers as St. Isidore of Seville and Rhabanus Maurus, to name two of the most famous. As early as the 7th century A. D. there were attempts to write reference works which would contain all useful and theoretic knowledge ranging from mechanics, animal lore and herbs, to rhetoric, etymology and antiquity. These encyclopedias naturally would offer information on the gods of the ancients. They would also be illustrated, just as our modern encyclopedias are. The

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<sup>40</sup>Dunchad (Martin of Laon) Glossae in Martianum, ed. Cora E. Lutz (n.p., 1944), p. 12.

De Universo of Rhabanus Maurus, for example, from its publication in the 9th century down through the 11th century, was repeatedly illustrated, the most famous copy being that in the library of Monte Cassino. Most probably because the pagan gods lent themselves to illustration, one finds in looking at the Monte Cassino Codex, that much of the manuscript is devoted to illustrations of the gods, each with its identifying attributes. A person who wished to read classical or early medieval authors could find mythological information in word and picture in these encyclopedias--both words and pictures deriving from the descriptions given of the pagan divinities in Fulgentius and Martianus.

Encyclopedias were large and costly and it is likely that excerpts were made from them from Carolingian times onward. The sections devoted to myth, along with a detached commentary on Martianus or Ovid, would form a particularly useful volume which would prepare for the later, more specialized mythographic handbook.

Fourteenth century examples of these handbooks gather together several rather different strands of early medieval interpretations of classical fable in one useful work of reference. The Mitologiae of Fulgentius supplies the main body of information on the gods and the basis of allegorical interpretation; the Martianus commentaries provide for discussion of an author devoted primarily to classical myth; the encyclopedias provide the idea of a mythographic work of reference of both an informational and allegorical nature, complete with pictures; and the Ovid commentary provides a detachable set of narratives, easily separable from the text, and employing material from books other than the Metamorphoses, by means of which any myth under discussion may be brought a step further into the Middle Ages. Most important, from these various strands, the idea developed that pagan mythology could instruct Christian men in ethical, religious and rhetorical ideas and therefore was of sufficient value to deserve study in a separate work. This idea was succinctly put by the author of the verse Ovide Moralisé when he said of the pagan

fables following St. Paul, "Tout est pour nostre enseignement" (I, 4099).

A mythographic tradition, then, with its roots as far back as the work of Fulgentius in the 6th century, is traceable down through the Middle Ages in a number of dissimilar works; what may be called a mythographic manner of dealing with the Orpheus Legend is also identifiable and indeed, remains remarkably constant from early writers on music or other subjects, who were not specifically mythographers, to the humanistic writers of the 14th century, engaged in compiling handbooks of classical material. The mythographic approach may be characterized first of all by its secularity--its tendency to regard Orpheus as an archetype of the eloquent man or perfect musician, rather than as a prefiguration of Christ; its explications were most frequently aimed at a lay readership or intended to aid in the reading of secular literature. Perhaps the single major exception is the Ovid commentary of Bersuire, which must have found its greatest use as a handbook for preachers wishing to enrich their sermons with classical exempla.

And even there, where we find the most zealous effort at Christianizing every element of pagan mythology, Orpheus' eloquence figures prominently in the interpretations offered--it has simply been transformed by Bersuire into a divinely inspired eloquence.

The writers on Orpheus whom I have grouped--rather loosely, to be sure--under the heading of "the mythographic approach" are: some early musicologists; Johannes Scotus, for his commentary on Martianus; Bernard Silvestris of Tours for his commentary on the first six books of the Aeneid; John Ridvall for his Fulgentius Metaforalis; and finally the humanistic mythographers, Boccaccio and Salutati. Orpheus, as he appears in their handbooks, has evolved from a simple pagan original into a figure of some stature, with a wife almost as much discussed as himself. His deeds have become adventures which fit him to be regarded as a romance hero, and in fact the twenty page narrative of Orpheus to be found in the De Laboribus Herculis is only a step away from the secular and purely literary treatment which he was to receive in Sir Orfeo and Henryson's "Orpheus and Eurydice."



Medieval writers on music. An anonymous Carthusian musicologist tells us that Orpheus was among those who invented music. His list of co-inventers is sufficiently interesting to be given here since it illustrates the mythographic writers' fondness for displays of classical erudition, and also shows how new historical characters were created in the Middle Ages, by people's misunderstanding of the material they were writing about. This writer, confused by the names of certain of the Greek modes, thinks that they were all the names of famous men. "Isti fuerunt inventores musice prophane," he says:

Tubal; Ptholomeus; Albinus; Nichomachus;  
Mercurius; Corebus; rex Lydorum, filius  
Attis; Libius; Terpandrix; Phrix; Phebus;  
Arabs; Savius Licaon; Profacius Perithos;  
Coloponnus; Zemon et Amphion; Pictagoras;  
Aristotiles; Nichita; Boetius; Orpheus;  
Thebeus; Teulex; Egyptius.<sup>41</sup> (my emphasis)

A somewhat similar passage from another anonymous writer on music reminds us of the references to Orpheus as a musician who learned his art from

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<sup>41</sup>This passage may be found in the Varia printed by Edmond de Coussemaker, Scriptorium de Musica Medii Aevi (Paris, 1864), II, 460.

the movements of the planets, which were common in late antiquity.

Some say music itself was discovered by Orpheus, who according to the philosophers, originally took his harmony from the movements of the stars, because by reason of the rubbing together of the celestial bodies, there comes forth a great melody.<sup>42</sup>

A somewhat more rationalistic explanation is offered by Aribo Scholasticus in his discussion of the origins and power of music. He wishes to explain the unknown or incredible by reference to the known. Essentially, he sees Orpheus as a man deified because of his skill with music.

Truly we know that hunters originally, their lungs resounding, drove roebucks and other wild game to themselves and the fable is not dark, but quite understandable which tells us that Orpheus placated Pluto with his lyre, when we read that David softened Saul's evil spirit by his harping.<sup>43</sup>

A 10th century author, Reginus of Prums, makes interesting additions to the Orpheus legend in his De Harmonica, and may have been following a handbook of

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<sup>42</sup> Tractatus de Musica, Coussemaker, III, 476.

<sup>43</sup> De Musica, ed. Martin Gerbert in Scriptores Ecclesiastici de Musica (San Blas, 1784) II, 225.

mythological lore which has not survived. Reginus does not seem to believe that Orpheus and Eurydice were real people and reveals a clerical bias against pagan fable when he says, following an unnamed authority, that "fabulam Orphei & Eurydicis esse confictam," this last word having the slightly perjorative sense of "confabulation" in the Middle Ages. He supplies us with the new and charming information that Orpheus wooed and won Eurydice by the power of his music, a detail I have not seen in Ovid, Virgil, or Boethius. Though suspicious of the reality of the fable, Reginus cannot help but explain the story in contemporary terms. He then gives a very brief account of the flight from Aristaeus, the death of Eurydice and Orpheus' failure to bring her up from the lower world. Then, closely following Fulgentius, he gives his allegorical explanation of the story.

Orpheus is called, so to speak, orea phone, that is, best voice; Eurydice stands for profound understanding. Orpheus, therefore, wished to call Eurydice from hell by the sound of his lyre, but did not prevail, because though the natural disposition of man strives to penetrate the depths of subtle harmony and to understand and evaluate it according to certain rules and to

call it to the light, that is to understanding, this human cognition hides, fleeing into the darkness of ignorance.<sup>44</sup>

Johannes Scotus. While the medieval writers on music no doubt follow Fulgentius in their interest in the Artes, a Carolingian author, Johannes Scotus, may have contributed to their view of music as the highest of the Artes. John's words about Orpheus had wide currency in the Middle Ages, judging from the number of later authors who echo him in one way or another. John's commentary on the De Nuptiis follows the etymological approach of Fulgentius but adds new material, making the legend of Orpheus and Eurydice an allegory of the interrelation between the theory and the practice of music.

Eurydice has a deep meaning. She is said to be the very art of music in its most profound principles and her husband is said to be Orpheus, that is, beautiful voice. This husband, if he shall have lost his singing power through any neglect of his art, must descend into the lower world for a deep understanding--for the

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<sup>44</sup> De Harmonica Institutione, Gerbert I, 246. Hucbold of St. Amand gives substantially the same account as Reginus but leaves out the detail about the wooing by music and adds an interpretation of Aristeus as virtue and the serpent as divine prudence. See his Enchiriadis Musica, c. 920 in PL 132, 981.

tones of music are arranged according to the rules of art--and he must return again. But when Eurydice compares the corporeal and transitory voice of Orpheus to the profound theory of the art of music, she flees again into her deep knowledge, because the understanding of these matters cannot appear in voices and because of this Orpheus remained sad; having the mere sound of music without possessing the underlying principles.<sup>45</sup>

John's view of the legend reminds one of the Renaissance trope of Fortitudo et Sapientia which Shakespeare uses in his Troilus. One faculty is meaningless without the other; each needs the other to fulfill its final cause. Though John seems to feel that Orpheus and Eurydice need each other, that is, that the principles of music need the voice or instrument to allow them form, he suggests that Eurydice, representing these principles, is somehow superior to Orpheus. The robe of the Lady Philosophy, as she stands before Boethius in his vision, is embroidered with the letters  $\Theta$  and  $\Pi$  for theoretika and praktika, but we feel that theoretika is the more significant of the two.

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<sup>45</sup> Johannis Scotti Annotationes in Marcianum, ed. Cora E. Lutz (Cambridge, Mass., 1939), pp. 192-3.

The most important detail of John's commentary on the legend, I think, is its presentation of the relations between the lovers. John does not subordinate Eurydice to Orpheus or see her as the passionate side of man's nature; rather, theory being higher than practice, she is superior to Orpheus and rejects his temporal call.

As was mentioned earlier, two points of view towards Eurydice can be seen in medieval discussions of the myth. One is clerical and misogynistic, the other almost a courtly view of her in which she stands as much above Orpheus as the Rose stands above the Suitor in the Romance of the Rose.

In the commentaries, Eurydice was usually seen as the passionate side of the soul which draws man to the hell of temporalia and she was so interpreted because of a certain strain of misogyny which shows itself most vividly in the Contra Jovinianum, the Lamentations of Matheolus and the Merchant's Tale to name but a few. In this view, Eurydice is subordinate to Orpheus automatically because she is a woman; Peter of Paris in absolute ignorance of what he was

glossing saw her as a shrew who was killed by her husband. This position is most clearly expressed in the Boethius commentaries of Conches and Trivet and the vernacular translators who follow them. Commentators on other works also, tend to reveal this hostility towards Eurydice. Eudès le Picard, in his explanation of the Ecologues of Theodolus, says simply that "Orpheus ratio est" and that Eurydice "sensualitas voluptatibus dedita." In another place he elaborates this latter view. "Eurydice is human nature" he says, and he associates her obliquely with Eve and her progeny: "of such a sort was the pact [between man and God] that if he sinned he must descend to hell from which he would never be freed." In addition, Eudès used a proverb in connection with Eurydice which we also saw in the work of the clerical Bersuire. Eudès glosses the Orpheus legend "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly" (Prov. 26:11). This Eurydice, he says, "was recalled by the speeches and instructions of Orpheus to the way of salvation, but she fell back and regressed into her first sin, just as a dog returns

to its vomit, and on this account hell will hold her perpetually."<sup>46</sup>

The mythographic interpretations of the legend developing from Fulgentius through Johannes Sootus represent the contrary current in which Eurydice is highly thought of. We shall see this view, closely associated with courtly love, Mariolatry and the coy women of romances, developed in the more purely literary works concerning Orpheus and Eurydice in the high Middle Ages, where it gives rise also to facultative interpretations in which Eurydice is presented as the higher faculty.<sup>47</sup>

Bernardus Silvestris. The 12th century Platonist Bernardus Silvestris of Tours wrote a commentary in the first six books of the Aeneid which does

<sup>46</sup>Eudès le Picard, Theodulus cum Commento (Paris, 1488). Sig. C. IIIr and G.IIv.

<sup>47</sup>In B. N. Lat. 7537 A., a Theodulus commentary, we read "Per Euridicen intelligamus discrecionem, per Orpheum eloquenciam. Discrecio enim amica est eloquencie . . . Orpheus, id est virtus, hanc, id est discrecionem voluit ad se attrahere et non potuit." Fol. 61 v62r. Here the author has seen a different meaning in the legend than that offered by Fulgentius and Johannes Scotus, but still Eurydice occupies the higher place those writers gave her.



not deal with all of the poem, does not explain it grammatically and does not spend much effort on paraphrase. Instead it concentrates on famous passages in the poem, such as the descent to the underworld in Book Six, to present a philosophic interpretation in which the six books of the Aeneid are allegorically explained as the six ages of the world. Bernard, like William of Conches, believes that the work to be explained had a nucleus of philosophic truth hidden beneath the veil of fable, and for him, Virgil was really a philosopher. Placing great value on the auctores and the Artes as the keys to learning and to philosophy, Bernard devotes the better part of his attention to pointing out the ethical precepts and high place of the arts in Virgil's work.<sup>48</sup>

The section in which Bernard discusses Orpheus begins with a review of Orpheus' birth, parentage, power over nature, loss of his wife and descent to hell.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>For an interesting discussion of Bernard's commentary, see J. R. O'Donnell C. S. B. "The Sources and Meaning of Bernard Silvester's Commentary on the Aeneid," Medieval Studies XXIV (1962), p. 231ff.

<sup>49</sup>Commentum Bernardi Silvestris Super Sex Libros Eneidos Virgilii, ed. G. Riedel (Gryphiswald, 1924), p. 54.

Then it turns to Bernard's interpretation, in which are blended Fulgentius, Johannes Scotus, Remigius and William of Conches, with William's work the most stressed. Here is what Bernard says about the etymology of Orpheus' name.

We take Orpheus for wisdom and eloquence, whence Orpheus is called, , so to speak, orea phone, that is, good voice. He ~~was~~ the son of Apollo and Calliope, that is, wisdom and eloquence, for wise and eloquent is the son of wisdom and eloquence. (p. 54) Calliope is called fine voice and is interpreted as eloquence because the voice effects eloquence. Orpheus has a lyre, that is, the rhetoric of oratory in which the various colors of rhetoric sound just as different quantities sound in music. (p. 54)

It would be fruitless to try and separate out all of the strands of this explanation and attribute them to various sources. But it is plain that Bernardus is writing here in the tradition of Fulgentius with an understandable emphasis on poetry and rhetoric since he himself was a poet.

Bernard is equally interested in Eurydice's name. He first gives the more clerical view of her. "Orpheus' wife is Eurydice, that is, natural concupiscence which is naturally joined to him." Bernard

observes, "and never is he without his natural concupiscence." Bernard follows William closely in seeing concupiscence as a kind of attendant spirit which is born with man and dies with him. Then he partially vindicates Eurydice, offering the more Fulgentian view of her name and significance:

We understand the natural concupiscence which is in human nature to be dominant and Eurydice is called the desire of good and she is given to desiring good.

He repeats William on Eurydice's travels through the field which is both green and dry earth but adds the more flattering biblical echo that Eurydice wandered "just as the flower of the field (*flos feni*) makes the glory of all the world." He tells the same story of her difficulties with Aristeus but provides a bit more information about the shepherd than William did.

Aristeus should be understood as divine virtue: ares, that is, virtue, from whence we get Ariopagus, that is, city of virtue, and theus is truly deus. He is called divine virtue because man has divinity in himself. To Aristeus is ascribed the duty of the shepherd because the obligation of virtue belongs to the shepherd, that is to care for the thoughts, words and deeds of the multitude. (p. 55)

Bernard returns to William for his discussion of Eurydice's coyness before the attentions of Aristaeus. The serpent which bites Eurydice, Bernard says, "is to be understood as temporal good who creeps about below and when he sees beauty is hurtful to it" (p. 55).

It is interesting to note that as we watch the development of the legend of Orpheus and his wife in the Middle Ages, we see that Eurydice becomes increasingly prominent, whether in a good or bad sense. Gradually Orpheus and Eurydice are coming to be seen as a couple of lovers, rather than a nameless woman who is the object of an antique hero's search, as was the case in Hellenic and Hellenistic literature.

John Ridvall. An early 14th century cleric, John Ridvall, wrote in addition to several scriptural commentaries which employed classical material, a curious work entitled Fulgentius Metaforalis or Fulgentius re-mythologized. This book, nominally a commentary on the Mitologiae of Fulgentius, was in fact

a preacher's handbook providing moralized information about myth from a Christian point of view.<sup>50</sup> Like John of Garland and Giovanni del Virgilio, Ridvall tried to make his accounts of classical myth memorable by putting the fables into verses. He then interpreted his own verses. Here is his commentary on the fable of Orpheus.

Orpheus was depicted by the poets as the best of harpers, whose efficacious melodies Boethius mentions in his Consolation. And well this delight agrees with our blessedness, as Rhabanus teaches in his book On the Nature of Things. By this instrument of music, we should understand the community of the church and all of the elect . . . (VI, 107-8)

This explanation would be of more help to someone in search of illustrations for theological ideas than it would be to a reader wishing to "understand" Fulgentius, who was, after all, not difficult in the original version. Ridvall's elaborations on the Mitologiae are focused not on the pagan myths of the past, but on present Christian doctrine, and in this they may be said to have departed from the spirit of the

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<sup>50</sup> See English Friars and Antiquity, p. 109ff for information about Ridvall. The treatise Fulgentius Metaforalis was edited by Hans Liebeschutz (Leipzig and Berlin, 1926).



mythographers which Fulgentius represents. The Fulgentius Metaforalis, however, was frequently illustrated, and in this respect would have been both a verbal and visual source for pictures of the gods in the Middle Ages.

Giovanni Boccaccio and Coluccio Salutati.

Boccaccio and Salutati represent the great flowering of the medieval mythographic tradition. They are medieval in date and yet Renaissance in spirit; their writings look forward to the purely secular mythographers like Natalis Comes and Vincent Cartari and the emblem writers Alciati and Ripa. Both Boccaccio and Salutati are not writing mythographic handbooks for the use of preachers as did Ridvall, but completely secular handbooks for the use of poets, rhetoricians--in short, all men who would like to ornament their style with an elegant classical phrase or allusion. Moreover, both Boccaccio and Salutati wrote in their mythographic works elaborate defenses of poetry and the allegorical method of reading pagan fable in reply to clerical attacks. Though these two authors are

interested in secular uses of myth, it should not be assumed that they were completely uninterested in the earlier Christian interpretations; rather, they are eclectic, presenting many points of view on Orpheus. Coupled with this more secular interest in myth, we find in these two writers a great interest in Greek learning and in the history and religious practices of the Greeks and Romans. In both men, though their working knowledge of the Greek language was probably small, we still see knowledge of Greek customs based on Greek texts.

Many of Boccaccio and Salutati's sources for the Orpheus material have not appeared in medieval discussions of the legend before. Boccaccio, in the Genealogie Deorum Gentilium, cites as his sources on Orpheus, Lactantius, Rhabanus Maurus, Virgil, Fulgentius, Pliny, Solinus, Statius, Eusebius, Leontius, and the mysterious Theodontius, a medieval Greek author now lost. One is amazed, in looking at the index nominum of Ullman's edition of Salutati's De Laboribus Herculis, at the author's wide range of reference. Salutati seems to have





been familiar with a wider selection of classical authors than would be found in the libraries of many modern colleges. He cites as sources for his account of Orpheus: Fulgentius, Remigius, Boccaccio, Servius, Epicurus, Virgil, Thales, Aristoxenus, Cicero, Hyginus, Ovid, Lactantius, Claudian, Nicomachus of Gerasa, Germanicus Caesar, Colophonius Estieus, Plato, Hippocrates, Eratosthenes, Servius and Alexander. It is rare to see a medieval commentator on the Orpheus legend mention more than one or at the most two, of his predecessors. Because Boccaccio and Salutati compare the differing accounts of many authors they are truly comparative mythographers.

Boccaccio begins with the standard account of Orpheus, quite close to that given by Ovid, but he has information from writers like Eratosthenes and Hyginus which the mythographic authors before him did not possess; also, certain romantic additions to the story, such as that Orpheus wooed Eurydice with music, interest him, so he retells them.

While the legend of Mercury's invention of the lyre and his giving of it to Orpheus is relatively



common knowledge in the Middle Ages, for some reason it does not seem to be the property of many of the early mythographers. It is included, however, by Boccaccio, who says he found it in the encyclopedia of Rhabanus Maurus.<sup>51</sup> Boccaccio's predilection for the Artes and more specifically for the arts of eloquence leads him to incorporate the story of the lyre into his etymological interpretation, and thus to add some views of his own.

The lyre, however, was given to him by Mercury, because by the lyre, having different intervals of tone, we must understand the faculty of oratory, which, clearly, is made not from one tone, but from many, and compositions are not composed of just one element but of many and they are strengthened by wisdom and eloquence and by good voice, and when all of these things were found in Orpheus, they were said to come from the rhythmic intervals of Mercury the God of eloquence. By this power of eloquence and oratory, Orpheus moved trees having fixed and firm roots, that is, men of obstinate opinions. . . (pp. 244-5).

In this interpretation, Boccaccio shows what was of interest in the Orpheus legend to him and to the men who would be likely to read his book. For Boccaccio, Orpheus was a Renaissance humanist, endowed with the

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<sup>51</sup>Giovanni Boccaccio, Genealogie Deorum Gentilium, ed. Vincenzo Romano (Bari, 1951), II, v, 244.

power of eloquence and the sense of order necessary to write a properly gorgeous Latin oration. Boccaccio might have altered Numenius' comment on Plato to read: "What is Orpheus but Cicero speaking Greek?" The power of his oratory is secular, however, and to it belongs the achievement not of converting hardened sinners but of changing obstinately held opinions. Immediately after this interpretation, Boccaccio gives the story of Orpheus from William of Conches' point of view. Of Eurydice he adds,

When natural concupiscence has fallen into hell, that is among temporalia, a prudent and eloquent man, that is, good oratory, can lead her back to virtue. (p. 245)

Lactantius is cited as having said that Orpheus brought Bacchic rites to Greece, and the information that Orpheus revealed the rites of the Bacchantes and was killed by them for this reason is introduced by Boccaccio from Theodotus. Boccaccio, however, confused the prophetic poems attributed to Orpheus with the rites which he instituted: "Ea sacra . . . Orphyca nominatur" (p. 246). He sees in the story of the snake turned to stone, an allegory

of time and the fame of the poet, another humanist concern. Finally, he adds that authors go even further in their tales of Orpheus and refers the interested reader to Pliny, who said that Orpheus invented augury and to Statius, who tells the story of Orpheus with the Argonauts (p. 247).

With Coluccio Salutati we come full circle to the kind of purely pagan method of interpretation which we saw in Boethius' treatment of the Orpheus legend. Salutati, like the Pseudo-Heraclitus, believed that beneath pagan fables were hidden profound philosophical truths. Salutati, in explaining the allegorical senses of the twelve labors of Hercules provides allegorical interpretations for virtually all of pagan myth. In Book Four of the De Laboribus, he discusses a number of famous descents to the underworld in an effort to shed light on the descent of Hercules, spending some twenty pages on the descent of Orpheus alone. One feels, in reading his discussion, that much of Salutati's "interpretation" is simply a display of his broad classical learning. He establishes himself as a critic and expositor

of earlier commentators, allowing that he will weigh and evaluate each in his turn.

The fables of Orpheus vary somewhat, just as other fables generally do. I shall put forth the text first of Germanicus, then the tradition of Hyginus, a not inferior author . . . because they did not always put everything together by their copious knowledge.<sup>52</sup>

Salutati tells us pretty much what Boccaccio does; he follows Eratosthenes closely, even to telling us of how Orpheus was killed for deserting the god Liber, a legend given in the lost Bassarides of Aeschylus. In a short passage he tells the legend of Orpheus; in a much longer one he explains it, "Now, however, we come to the allegorical sense" (p. 493). He admits that he knows what the allegorical expositors before him have said about Orpheus: "I am not ignorant that Fulgentius has assigned this fable to the art of music" (p. 493). And he knows what Remigius and even "my father who can never be sufficiently praised for the study of poetry, Iohannes Boccatus," had to say on the subject of myth. But,

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<sup>52</sup>Colucii Salutati De Laboribus Herculis, ed. B. L. Ullman (Zurich, 1947), II, iv, p. 489.

he says, it is more pleasing to go into every sense of a myth and find one's own interpretation and so,

We think the poets mean by the figure of Orpheus, those Epicureans who follow pleasure. (p. 493)

By a rather elaborate etymological discussion, too long to repeat here, Salutati conjectures that Orpheus may possibly be the son of Calliope and Oeagrus, the river god. Thus Orpheus is a man "born of water, that is matter, and harmony, that is proportion" (p. 495). He naturally seeks Eurydice as a mate because she means good judgement of the flux of things because "eu is good, rheo is flow (fluo) and dichi is judgement" (p. 496).

Salutati also has an interesting interpretation of Orpheus' death by the Bacchantes, coupling it with the descent motif he is nominally concerned to discuss. Orpheus descending into hell represents voluptuous man who, not directing himself towards the end of reason and virtue, forgets the proper use of the powers of generation which are symbolized by Father Liber. Instead, he seeks the rites of Venus, indulging himself in pleasure, and he is torn apart



by the Thracian women or Bacchantes because without a doubt the work of Venus weakens a man and consumes the human body (p. 503). Tradition has it that Orpheus was a Thracian and was torn apart in Thrace, a sad victim of the furious women of Mount Pangaeus. Thrace, according to Alexander, means Aphrodite, that is Venus. Pangaeus comes from "pan," totum or all and "geus" from terra or earth. So Pangaeus is all earth. Now as Orpheus was a man of pleasure, what other place could be so suitable for him to die in than Thrace, that is the region of Venus, and on the Mountain Pangaeus, meaning all of the earth.

Salutati has compiled a collection of purely ethical allegories of the sort which the men of the Renaissance loved so well. While these allegories are not hostile to religion, they function without its aid, and the God of the Hebrews is mentioned much less in the discussion of Orpheus than the God of the Greeks. It is interesting, besides, to see how classical in spirit Salutati is. Nothing over-much--to metron--could be the motto of his Orpheus interpretation. Epicureans--a Greek and Roman

philosophical sect--rather than heretics of the Church are now the enemies of virtue to be chastized in the Orpheus legend. If Boccaccio made Orpheus a humanist, Salutati makes him a wise man ruined by a false philosophical system of Greece and Rome. Truly we have come from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance in these Orpheus commentaries.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ORPHEUS IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

Though the medieval commentators tend to portray Orpheus and Eurydice as actors in an ethical drama, here and there in their discussions one catches glimpses of a different Orpheus, a knight whose comeliness is as famous as his skill on the lyre, and who is distinguished as much by loyalty to his lady as by his feats. Certainly the addition to the story of extraneous material, biblical or legendary, on the part of various commentators helped to develop a less classical and more medieval Orpheus. But it is in secular literature of entertainment that we find Orpheus truly assimilated by medieval thought and emerging as a hero in the best romance tradition.

Calliope taught Orpheus to sing and harp  
and he was a very virtuous man in love;  
for he loved only one woman, and when she  
died he sang songs continuously for her  
memory, and when he died he was named by



the gods the most loyal of lovers. Orpheus was a powerful man, a loyal and ardent lover, and was called the god of melody.<sup>1</sup>

Orpheus exists in medieval literature mainly as a noble figure of courtly manners. The way he evolved into this figure will be the concern of the present chapter. I shall try, first, to trace the richening of the Orpheus legend by its partial conflation with the biblical story of David--this association helped to increase Orpheus' nobility--second, to show how Orpheus became primarily a faithful lover and hero of romance, and third, to discuss the use of Orpheus as a central character in the anonymous Sir Orfeo and in Robert Henryson's "Orpheus and Eurydice." In these two works we find the medieval flowering of the Orpheus legend, distant though it may seem from the original legend of Greece and Rome.

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<sup>1</sup>E. Langlois ed. Recueil d'Arts de Seconde Rhétorique (Paris, 1902) II, 39-40. See also B. N. Fr. Sign. Rés. R. which says "But the law of love is so strong that it fears neither pain nor death, and so it is folly to legislate to courtly love. For Orpheus was a courtly lover (fins amans)." Fol. 3v. According to Michault Taillevent, "never was there a better lover than Orpheus." See P. Champion, Histoire Poétique de XVe Siècle (Paris, 1925), p. 325.

## Orpheus and David

If the association of Orpheus and Christ seemed to come naturally to medieval artists and writers, even more ready was the association of Orpheus with David. The resemblances between the two men would have been quickly apparent to persons trained in biblical and classical typology. David came of the line of Patriarchs; Orpheus was the son of the god Apollo. Sent to a remote countryside to pasture his flock, David played upon his harp and later used it to drive the evil spirit from Saul. Orpheus played his lyre and sang to the animals in the wilderness of Thrace, and later soothed and won to his cause the infernal gods. In the account of David's surrounding himself with musicians and organizing them into twenty-four classes (I Chron. 15:25), a medieval man would have seen hints not only of Orpheus' pre-eminence among musicians but also of his supposed discovery of the laws of harmony and arrangement of the tones of music. The story of how David's lyre succeeded in calming Saul was interpreted as prefiguring the power of Christ's gentle

words over death, hell and the devil. Likewise Orpheus' victory in the underworld was taken by at least one author--the author of the Ovide Moralisé mentioned earlier--to be an analogue to Christ's triumph in the harrowing of hell, the lyre serving as a figure for the cross. John Chrysostom held that David's harp, victorious over Saul's evil spirit, was a figure for the divine love in which the charitable virtues unite as the sounds of each string in a single consonance.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, both David and Orpheus were the authors of certain songs, the Psalms and the Orphica for which they received inspiration from God. To an antique audience, the Palinode of Orpheus suggested a divinely inspired wisdom, just as did the Psalms. Certainly Justin Martyr, who, we will recall, passed on the text of Orpheus' Palinode, must have had Orpheus and David in mind when he said:

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<sup>2</sup>See Evelyn Reuter, Les Représentations de la Musique dans la Sculpture Romane en France (Paris, 1938), p. 8ff. In the Confessio Amantis, John Gower hopes to see the Empedoclean strife of the elements resolved by a Boethian Amor given form in the combined song of Arion, Orpheus and David, G. C. Macaulay ed. The English Works of John Gower (Oxford, 1900) I, ll.1053-1065.

For neither by nature nor by human conception is it possible for men to know things so great and divine but by the gift which then descended from above upon the holy men, who had no need of rhetorical art, nor of uttering anything in a contentious or quarrelsome manner, but to present themselves pure to the energy of the Divine Spirit, in order that the divine plectrum itself, descending from heaven, and using righteous men as an instrument like a harp or a lyre, might reveal to us the knowledge of things divine and heavenly (Ad Gr. 8, ANF, p. 294).

We have seen how Orpheus was associated with schemes of cosmological harmony. David too, wrote of the heavenly motions, praising God's power in the starry sky (Ps. 147,150), enjoining sun, moon and stars to praise God with him (Ps. 148), and writing "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Ps. 19:1).<sup>3</sup>

Though medieval men could certainly have arrived at comparisons of Orpheus and David on their own, they would have been aided by traditional and authoritative comparisons, both verbal and visual, dating from late antiquity. The relationship between words and pictures

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<sup>3</sup>For further discussion of David and the music of the heavens, see Charles De Tolnay "Music of the Universe" Journal of the Walters Art Gallery VI (1943), p. 84ff.



is especially important in the case of Orpheus and David, as the two media exercised a reciprocal influence on each other. Through artistic conflation, David acquired a new animal audience and Orpheus acquired a nimbus of divine nobility, as well as regal costume. Moreover, the landscape shown behind Orpheus acquired certain characteristic features from medieval psalter illustrations of David. These transmutations found their way into literary treatments--especially treatments of Orpheus, about whom less knowledge was established--and inspired, in their turn, new illustrations. Orpheus, sent, so to speak, to David's country, returned a different man.

Association of the two men in the Middle Ages was of two types. Medieval writers compared Orpheus and David--somewhat as Clement of Alexandria had compared them--to Orpheus' disadvantage.<sup>4</sup> In such comparisons the two figures, are, as we would expect,

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<sup>4</sup>For example, Georgius Pisidius, in his versified account of the Creation said "For however much Orpheus smote his divinely tuned lyre [in cosmological song], so much the more, David, seeing the glory of the heavens as they stretched from the height to the depths of creation, sang out about them." Hexameron, PG 92, 1438-1439.

keep distinct from each other. But medieval artists, particularly the illustrators of manuscripts, tended to conflate Orpheus with David, often using a picture of the one as a model for a picture of the other. We find, for example, in an illuminated initial from a 13th century hagiographic manuscript (Ambrosiana B 32, 3r, Fig. 1), King David, for he wears a crown, playing a harp and seated in a position which we have come to associate with the Orpheus of late antique mosaics. Above him are a group of animals in separate registers, their backgrounds recalling the circular compartments of English Orpheus mosaics. While a lion and a bear are mentioned in the account of David's shepherd life (I Sam. 18:34), the camel and the rabbit seem clearly to have come from Orpheus iconography. The man who illustrated this manuscript may well have had before

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See also Cassiodorus, Divine and Human Headings, tr. L. W. Jones (N. Y., 1946) II, 195 and Expositio in Psalterium 49 (50) PL 70, 352; Cursor Mundi, ed. R. Morris, EETS, I, 428 and John Lydgate, Reson and Sensuallyte, ed. E. Sieper (London, 1901-1903) I, 146ff. An anonymous commentator on the Eoloques of Theodulus made this comparison: "just as Orpheus played his lyre in hell, so David played before Saul; and just as Orpheus softened the gods of the underworld with his harp, so David softened Saul's evil spirit." B. N. Lat. 8115, Fol. 36v.

him a picture of Orpheus among the animals, from which he borrowed heavily in his representation of David.

The process by which illustrators of sacred texts modeled their figures and whole compositions on classical figures and ensembles has been explained by Kurt Weitzmann with a wealth of examples.<sup>5</sup> He has shown that

Epic poems, dramas, mythological handbooks and other products of classical literature were still appreciated in the Middle and Late Byzantine periods . . . where they had survived with illustrations, these, too, appealed to the Byzantine public and the artist who desired to copy them (p. 45).

Weitzmann believes, for example, that one possible source for a peculiarly Greco-Roman scene in a 10th century codex of Nicander may have been a mosaic from the Piazza Amerina (p. 49)--the site, also, of a floor mosaic of Orpheus. He points out that mythological representations of classical and late antique vintage were highly important in the development of biblical iconography generally.

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<sup>5</sup>Kurt Weitzmann, "The Survival of Mythological Representations in Early Christian and Byzantine Art and their Impact on Christian Iconography," Dumbarton Oaks Papers XIV (1960).

. . . The earliest illustrators of the Old Testament, either Hellenized Jews or Christians, relied on the formal vocabulary of Greco-Roman art, having no pictorial tradition of their own . . . the first illustrators of the Bible must have roamed through extensive classical picture cycles, searching not only for suitable figure types, but for whole compositions which were appropriate from the formal point of view and had similar meanings as well (p. 57).

There were sufficient visual and symbolic similarities between Orpheus and David to insure that a man wishing to illustrate a psalter, for instance, and needing a model for David would readily have seized on Orpheus. And so it is to pictures generally that we must look in order to see how Orpheus and David exchanged certain features--features which in the case of Orpheus, were to be retained and elaborated upon in literary treatments.

Two groups of illustrated manuscripts provide the most fruitful supply of pictures for our investigations--Byzantine psalters of the 11th century and two manuscripts of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzen from about the same period. The homily In Sancta Lumina--as was pointed out in our discussion of the trope of antiquity--spoke out against the pagan rites

of Orpheus among other pagan customs still practiced in Gregory's day. The illustrators of the homily provided pictures of some of these pagan characters and their deeds.

The illustrated collections of Psalms can be divided into two kinds. First, we have a classicizing group--quite consciously making use of antique originals as models and sources for details. These psalters are usually called aristocratic, for they are rather self-conscious works of art with full-page, beautifully done pictures, and could only have been commissioned by extremely wealthy persons. Rather than illustrate each psalm, the aristocratic psalter uses many illustrations before the text of the first psalm, portraying the life of David in a number of ornate scenes and having little or no connections with the texts of the psalms themselves. Such illustrations fill the place which the portrait and biography of a classical author would have taken at the beginning of a classical manuscript. The portraits of the evangelists found at the beginnings of books in manuscripts of the New Testament are also remnants of this tradition. The illustrators' attention to naturalistic anatomy and their use of personification and

allegory in these aristocratic psalters suggests that these works were done in imitation of what the illustrators thought to be a Hellenic style, and probably appealed to men who had some acquaintance with early Greek authors. In such collections of the Psalms, David appears as a classical young man surrounded by personifications and details which echo antique literature. He looks much more like an Arcadian shepherd from Theocritus than like King David and many of his features come from mosaics and book illustrations of pagan Orpheus.

The second kind of psalter illustration we might call the biblical variety; it too is related to late antique art, but is more muted and keeps much more to the text of the Psalms. It is indebted to the good shepherd side of the Orpheus legend and tends to show the influence of catacomb art or Eastern portraits of Orpheus the good shepherd.

Two illustrations of the biblical style of Orpheus-David are to be found in the psalters Mount Athos Vatopedi 761 and Ambrosiana M. 54 Supp. (Figs. 2 and 3); both were painted about the 11th century.

The Ambrosiana portrait suggests to me the influence of catacomb fresco of the sort which we examined in Chapter Two. David sits dressed in simple shepherd's clothes in a little niche resembling those in which Orpheus portraits were painted in the catacombs. He is frontal and appears to be seated naturally on a hillock; his displaced lyre on display and his panto-crator pose suggest the Christian good-shepherd-Orpheus fresco in the cemetery of Aurelius. The birds above the little niche where David sits may have been added by a later hand, but they--particularly the peacocks--remind one of the peacocks of the resurrection found in catacomb portraits of Orpheus as for example in the cemetery of Domitilla. David is nimbed and near him sits a personification of Melodia. His body is anatomically sophisticated and yet appears in the clumsy frontal pose of late antique Orpheus mosaics and frescos. Everything about the composition suggests that the artist had seen a wall painting or illustration in a mythological handbook dating from the 4th or 5th century before he painted this picture. The feeling on the whole is pastoral and David here could easily

be the Orpheus good-shepherd if Melodia were absent.

The Vatopedi picture is clearly related to the Ambrosiana miniature but its drawing is more sophisticated. It differs also from the Ambrosiana picture in that it seems to adhere more closely to the story of David in the Bible--particularly to the account of David's exile in the mountains of En-Gadi as a shepherd, for it provides a rockier terrain and gives greater prominence to the animals than did the Ambrosiana picture.<sup>6</sup> In these two psalters David is not crowned but nimbed--an antique device which we saw in Orpheus iconography in the mosaic floor from Ptolemais. By his nimbus David is identified not yet as a king but as a person who has achieved divine recognition.

The classicizing or aristocratic style of Orpheus-David illustration is represented by two pictures about which much has been written. These are from the well-known Paris psalter, B. N. Gr. Coislin 139, and from the Vatical psalter, Cod. Barb. Gr. 320,

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<sup>6</sup>For discussion of this psalter see Kurt Weitzmann, "The Psalter Vatopedi 761," Journal of the Walters Art Gallery X (1947).



both of 11th century date. The two illustrations, as can clearly be seen (Figs. 4 and 5) are intimately related by their style and iconography. Because the Vatican psalter is closer to the biblical or pastoral style we discussed above, it would seem as if this were the archetype for the Paris psalter. The nimbed figure of Melodia, while classical in conception and dress, and the nimbed David among the rocks are close in treatment to their forerunners in the Vatopedi and Ambrosiana psalters. The details which most suggest the copying of antique Orpheus scenes or other antique groups are the fact that Melodia is partially naked--as was the Orpheus of the more obviously classicizing mosaics--as well as the fact that David and Melodia wear some kind of circlet or head ornament rather like those worn by the Sibyl and Orpheus in an illustration from the Vatican Virgil, painted about the 5th century A.D. (Fig. 6), which in other respects of dress and handling of the figure is similar to the Vatican psalter. The only discordant elements in the Vatican psalter are a nymph, a mountain god of Bethlehem and a dog, who seem extraneous to a composition portraying a Hebrew

David. These figures are not well anchored to the terrain and may have been added from another source. The mountain god of Bethlehem has connections both with antique art and with Orpheus illustration in western manuscripts. The mountain god of Bethlehem rests in the attitude of the classical sleeping river god (Fig. 7) and was apparently copied from such a figure. It would seem as if a western artist had seen the Paris and Vatican psalters or others very like them. Then, dimly remembering the pose of Orpheus-David or confusing it with the mountain god of Bethlehem, he drew Orpheus in the pose of a sleeping river god in a cosmological illustration from a manuscript at Reims (Fig. 8). Such were the ways in which Orpheus acquired new attitudes and attributes.

Kurt Weitzmann and H. Buchthal are in disagreement as to the models for the personifications. Briefly, Weitzmann argues about the Paris psalter--but the same position holds for the Vatican psalter--that the figure of David with his sheep is central and that the personifications are extraneous and copied from other manuscripts. Thus the miniatures

are made up of disconnected parts.<sup>7</sup> H. Buchthal, on the other hand,<sup>8</sup> feels that the Paris picture, particularly, is related to Campanian landscape painting; he derives the figures of David and Melodia from the linked loving couples of antiquity who were sometimes found in such bucolic wall paintings. Buchthal distinguishes between the David of the Vatican psalter, who is frontal, and so derived from late antique Orpheus illustration, and the Paris David, who is presented in profile, and who he thinks is related to the illustrations of Paris with Venus in bucolic surroundings. While it is true that the frontal Orpheus is more common in late antiquity, there are many mosaics of a classicizing style which show Orpheus in profile, and the artist of the Paris psalter could have seen one of these. Finally, Buchthal denies Weitzmann's idea that the personifications were, though antique in idea, original with the illustrator of the psalter, and feels that they may have been

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<sup>7</sup> Kurt Weitzmann, "Der Pariser Psalter," Jahrbuch für Kunstwerke (1929), p. 178.

<sup>8</sup> H. Buchthal, The Miniatures of the Paris Psalter (London, 1938), p. 13ff.

based on similar personifications in much earlier illustrations (p. 73). I have never seen any such personifications associated with Orpheus or David in antique art.

In the Paris psalter the figures of David, Melodia and the mountain god are much more classical in style; they wear multicolored robes and the god wears a laurel fillet of some sort; moreover, their musculature is revealed by their Hellenized clothing as though the artist wished to show that he could handle anatomy in a classical way. David and Melodia remind one of Orpheus among the muses in a wall painting from Pompei; the elaborateness of costuming and detail is justified to some degree by the presence in the background of the picture of a city where such fashionably dressed people might live. While the Vatican psalter seems to be in the mosaic tradition of a late antique frontal Orpheus, transmitted perhaps, through the Vatican Virgil, the more sophisticated Paris psalter appears more likely to have been derived from antique wall painting, mosaics in a Hellenizing style from the 1st or 2d centuries A.D. or classical codex illustration.

In the Vatican and Paris psalters, David is accompanied by several figures, and hence the illustrations have considerable narrative emphasis. The illustrations of Orpheus from Gregory of Nazianzen's homily, In Sancta Lumina, however, show Orpheus in isolation except for his animals, or even bereft of these. Certain features of these Orpheus illustrations suggest a common heritage with the psalter illustrations discussed above, as well as with the mosaics from late antiquity. In the Gregory manuscript from Mount Athos (Fig. 9)<sup>9</sup> Orpheus is placed on a mountain which could be reminiscent either of his deeds on Mount Pangaeus or of his conflation with David in the psalters. He shares with David and with the Orpheus of the Vatican Virgil a sweet and youthful expression which apparently is meant to be classical and perhaps is derived from the Apollo Kouros figure. He is frontal, and the animals symmetrically grouped around him suggest mosaic work. Most clearly related to contemporary psalter art though, are the nimbus and the highly ornamented trousers, as well as the use of the mountain outline as a backdrop

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<sup>9</sup> Mount Athos Panteleimon 6, Fol. 165a.

for the figure of Orpheus. It is interesting to note that the lyre of Orpheus rests on a little altar, perhaps related to the sacred pillars in the aristocratic psalters or to the altars on which Orpheus Tauroctonos supports his lyre in the Italian sarcophagi discussed earlier. There is no particular reason for having the lyre on an altar unless the artist was copying a manuscript which he held to be authoritative and which did have it so placed. The 11th century Byzantine carvers who made the Veroli casket, which has reliefs from pagan mythology, reproduced a number of details--probably from classical codices--which could have no possible meaning to them and yet had this same classical authority.

A second Gregory manuscript (Fig. 10), now in Paris,<sup>10</sup> features an Orpheus who is indistinguishable from the David of the biblical psalters except that he does not have Melodia by him; the absence of the animals may be accounted for also by the close relationship to a psalter illustration of David where the sheep may have been much subordinated to the

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<sup>10</sup>B. N. Gr. Coislin 239, Fol. 122v.

shepherd. This Orpheus is nimbed as were the Davids in the biblical-style psalters, and also rests his lyre on a small altar. Behind him is the framing mountain which we saw in the aristocratic psalters.<sup>11</sup>

Medieval authors and illustrators from the west who saw these various representations of Orpheus and David could easily have transmitted in their own work the new attributes which Orpheus acquired in his Byzantine travels. Orpheus becomes a solitary singer --perhaps even an exile--in the mountains, or curious personifications replace the traditional underworld figures associated with him; he could become a river god; he is often crowned and dressed in regal garb. He could, in short, become a kingly figure fit for a medieval romance like Sir Orfeo.

#### Orpheus the Romance Hero

The romance can be described briefly as a story of adventure, whose hero, acting frequently

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<sup>11</sup>For further discussion of Orpheus in these Gregory manuscripts, see Kurt Weitzmann, Greek Mythology in Byzantine Art (Princeton, 1951), pp. 67-8.

from the impulse of love, sets out upon a quest during which he undergoes many trials, meets supernatural beings in supernatural landscapes and has occasion to engage in lengthy monologues, dialogues, complaints and songs.<sup>12</sup> Plainly, the legend of Orpheus is well-suited to this genre. Aside from its narrative line which might almost be said to be an archetypal romance, the legend lends itself in a number of other ways to romance treatment. For one thing, its hero was a famous person of classical antiquity, thus coming from one of the favorite sources for knightly adventures. Greek or Latin myth, medievalized, provided the base for many a vernacular romance, though as Dorothy Everett observes, "Whatever the original home of the romance hero, he is transformed into a knight and conforms to medieval ideas of knightly behavior" (p. 101).

Second, the story of Orpheus is about love which knows no law, and offers much latitude for a treatment of the psychology of lover and loved one, as well as

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<sup>12</sup>Dorothy Everett gives a fine account of the genre in "A Characterization of the English Medieval Romance," Essays and Studies XV (1929), p. 101ff.



the philosophy of courtly love--a favorite subject--perhaps one should say one of the principal subjects of romance. Romance turns the psychology of the courtly amatory poet into narrative, just as the narrative of Orpheus' and Eurydice's love comes to be psychologized in poems and romances.

Third, the story of Orpheus is removed from the facts of daily existence, set in the past and in another country; it brings to a medieval literature of entertainment wide-ranging possibilities for exotic costume, strange customs, magic and fabulous beasts, in the deeds of Orpheus among the Thracians, the power of his lyre, and his descent to the underworld.

Stylistically, the writers of medieval romances accommodated the Orpheus legend to their genre in other ways. They developed an interior life for Orpheus, and an expression of it in his songs, reflecting the new interest in the psychology of the classical or mythological person. The Roman d'Eneas, written about 1155, makes Lavinia, who is hardly mentioned in Virgil's epic of battles, adventures and voyages, into the heroine and deals at great length with her love for the

pious hero. Thus the focus of the Roman is no longer on the heroic combat of Aeneas and Turnus for the hand of Lavinia as a symbol of Italian destiny, but rather on the interior lives of Aeneas and Lavinia themselves, Romances, in short, were more concerned with psychology than with combat, with subjective presentation of feeling than with objective description of action.

Romance also tended to medievalize classical heroes, not only in their ideals and behaviour, but also in their houses, clothing, jewels, armor, methods of battle and customary pursuits. Even the fairies go hunting in the medieval manner in Sir Orfeo. It is not realism or contemporary description, but rather an idealization of ordinary life that we find imposed by the romance upon its classical characters, both in text and in illustration; ordinary life becomes finer, more exotic, seen as remote from the present, while the ancient heroes become marvelously up to date. Interest in contemporary domestic detail is reinforced, in the romance, by an stylistic concern with description, often for its own sake. This concern was both a heritage of the classical epic and a development

from the various uses of the ornatus, amplificatio and descriptio of clerical rhetoric. But where Homer gives a catalogue of ships, the romance, appealing to the world of fashion, tells us what Gawain was wearing or what Arthur ate for dinner. Romance looks to Greece and Rome for many of its characters, but to Paris and London for its clothes. It takes great interest in feasts, in favorite dishes of nobles, well known wines, entertainment such as the hunt, and the latest fashions in wooing and singing. Unlike the didactic neo-Latin literature of the period--such as the allegorical De Planctu Naturae of Alan of Lille--vernacular romance is very much up to date in its habits and properties. But since it strives for that which is larger than life and out of the ordinary, everything it touches tends to be heightened and embellished, as indeed the medievalized story of Orpheus is.

One other feature of romance style is its penchant for talk. It has sticomythic conversation after the plays of Seneca, long introspective monologues imitated from Ovid's Amores and Heroides, and finally dialogues within monologues and intercalated songs taken

from the form of the Menippean satire made popular by Boethius and Martianus Capella and later by Alan of Lille's De Planctu. This use of dialogue, conversation and song within dialogue is particularly important with respect to Orpheus. The marriage of the Orpheus legend with the romance style produced, among other things, several soliloquies, complaints and songs, to which we may attribute, at least in part, Orpheus's subsequent reputation as a minstrel. We shall say more about this later.

As early as King Alfred's translation of Boethius, what might be termed a romantic approach to the Orpheus legend was beginning to take shape. Alfred renders the opening of the Orpheus meter in the Consolation: "Once upon a time it came to pass that a harp player lived in the country called Thracia," thus setting the story in an indefinite fairy-tale time. He idealizes the characters in what was later to become standard romance style, for the "harper was so good, it was quite unheard of . . . he had a wife without her equal, named Eurydice." Alfred supplies us with the information, to reappear in Sir Orfeo,

that after his wife's death, Orpheus "was off to the forest, and sate upon the hills both day and night." When he descends to hell, Orpheus so charms Cerberus that the dog of hell wags his tail. The dwellers of hell meet Orpheus enthusiastically and bring him to their king and help him in his plea (op. cit. pp. 116-117) because all men are vassals to the lord of love. None of this is in Boethius or any other classical source; Alfred has presented the whole story of Orpheus from the perspective of a medieval English nobleman.

Such elaborations of the Orpheus legend as Alfred's provided the impetus for similar elaborations in medieval poetry. A Latin continuation of Capella's De Nuptiis, probably of the 12th century, contains a long passage on Orpheus and Eurydice. This poem features an elaborate romance-like underworld topography and emphasizes the lovers and their story. In it, Orpheus is made to sing a long hymn to the gods and a story of their deeds, then a song about his descent to the underworld and what he found there when he sought his wife. The songs are highly ornate and the gods and their deeds are described minutely.

At last the sad Orpheus raises a tomb for Eurydice  
 --after four hundred lines of mournful song and ten  
 days of fasting, "weeping, he raised a tomb covered  
 with laurel, gems and gold inscribed on the door this  
 sad epitaph 'this stone contains the modest remains  
 of Eurydice . . . her husband killed her at the gate  
 of hell and one urn holds the ashes of their double  
 flesh . . ."<sup>13</sup>

This poem exhibits just the kind of ingenuity  
 that would be demonstrated by a modern student if he  
 were asked, for example, to write a continuation of  
Paradise Lost. Somewhere, a medieval teacher had set  
 a student to writing a continuation and elaboration  
 of Martianus' poem, or, more likely, of one of the  
 episodes from it.

School exercises of this kind were of great  
 importance for the growth of Orpheus as a romance hero.  
 From the 11th through the 15th century, it was common  
 practice for teachers to make students write poems

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<sup>13</sup> A. Boutemy, "Une Version Médiévale Inconnue  
 de la Légende d'Orphée," Hommages à Joseph Bidez et à  
 Franz Cumont (Brussels, 1949), p. 53ff, and l. 649ff.

which elaborated classical stories in order to give the student of rhetoric practice in metrics as well as in the use of the ornatus, effictio and similitudo which were associated with the teaching of the figurae verborum and sententiarum in the schools. Thus it came about that many undistinguished if ingenious lyrical poems embodying classical subject matter were produced during the Middle Ages. Often these exercises put into a vernacular language, or more often into Latin, parts of Ovid's Heroides, Amores, Art of Love, or individual fables from the Metamorphoses. As a result of this practice, one can see the increasing incursion of mythological allusion and story into the courtly love lyrics, for example, of Guillaume de Machaut, his pupil Eustache Deschamps, and Christine de Pisan. Nor was Chaucer above such rhetorical exercises as the Knight's Tale demonstrates.<sup>14</sup> Here Orpheus is one of the many

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<sup>14</sup>A ballade by Jean le Mote is an interesting example of this sort of classicizing school exercise. The poem is about a love-sick lady, modeled on one of the heroines of Ovid's Heroides. She says that she is so unhappy that she can hear nothing, not even "Dyodonas a ses cleres buisines,/Ne Orpheus le dieux de melodie,/Ne Musicans a ses chancons divines,/Ne Dedalus od sa gaye maisterie." She concludes "Je suis avec Dido a

allusions which amplify the thought of Jean le Mote. Other medieval poets make Orpheus the subject of the entire rhetorical poem.

These poems are generally far longer than any classical story of Orpheus and Eurydice and are extreme examples of the amplificatio or rhetorical elaboration of a narrative detail by description and dialogue. Such poems on Orpheus include dialogue, intercalated lyrics, apostrophes, great elaboration of landscape and costume, and sometimes a happy ending. In essence, they are new poems which use the legend of Orpheus and Eurydice for a base but which have little to do with the version of the story given by Ovid and Virgil, to whose works they are nominally indebted.

Several such works are extant. They include a five-hundred line poem on Orpheus by Thierry of St. Trond; a shorter poem by a certain Gautier, a friend of Marbode the writer of the lapidary; and a section on Orpheus in a long conversation poem by Godefroy of

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compagnie! / Ovide, ou sont remedes femenines?" This poem was printed by E. Pognon, "Ballades Mythologiques," Humanisme et Renaissance V (1938), p. 408.



of Reims, called his "Dialogue with Calliope." These poems are all of 11th century date. The 12th century offers two poems on Orpheus from a manuscript in the Laurentian Library at Florence--their editor suggests that they might have been written by Abelard<sup>15</sup>--and a six-hundred line poem on Orpheus which is the continuation of the De Nuptuiis referred to earlier. All of these poems are of minor interest poetically, but very important as evidence for the growth of a romance tradition around the figure of Orpheus. As they are rather similar in content, a few extracts from these poems will be sufficient to illustrate the kind of changes that the Orpheus myth was undergoing at that time.

Thierry's poem shows the poet's indebtedness to allegorical prose commentaries on the Orpheus myth such as that written by Johannes Scotus. The following lines deal with Orpheus' actions after he has looked back and lost Eurydice.

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<sup>15</sup> Wilhelm Meyer, "Zwei Mittellateinische Lieder in Florenz," Studi Letterari e Linguistici Dedicati a Pio Rajna (Milan, 1911).

Unable to control his thoughts, lover turned his eyes to beloved. Who can oppose the Fates? Who can escape the Fates? Already approaching the light, already almost his, his Eurydice is seized back, and seized she becomes the shade she had been. The noble lutanist, relying on the muse, soon returning again to the desolation of the lowest pit, would soften stony hearts with his peace-bringing lyre, would appease the Parcae, bend the Eumenides; weeping he would play, playing repeat his prayers --and his genius cannot but have its effect. But he flees from the Stygians, hateful even in their offering of gifts, disdaining to become a suppliant to evil. So, trusting with all the power of his spirit in the divinity of his art, bravely he took what he desired from Styx by force. Thus art, aided by firm purpose, vanquished nature, showing that all things yield to Lady Virtue.<sup>16</sup>

Thierry has expanded Ovid's brief account of this event to almost thirty lines in his own poem, making use of various techniques of the ornatus, such as repetitio, conversio and complexio. Thierry is really more interested, one feels, in the rhetorical possibilities of the myth than in the myth itself.

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<sup>16</sup>The text of Thierry's poem is printed in full in F. W. Otto, Commentarii Critici in Codices Bibliothecae Gissensis (Gissen, 1842). I have used the translation of Peter Dronke, "The Return of Eurydice," Classica et Medievalia XXIII (1962).

His curious ending for the story, with its suggestion that Eurydice is returned to Orpheus a second time because of his power of eloquence, is rather ambiguously presented. Thierry is trying, perhaps, to turn allegory into narrative and does not succeed too well. He seems to be relying on one of the commentaries which tell us that Orpheus, after the descent into temporalia, conquered it and so regained good judgment, that is eu dike, and returned to the light; but he fails to see that Eurydice is allegorically, not literally, returned.

Gautier and Godefroy also give positive endings to the story, but they simply change the story. The former tells us that "at the god's command his wife is given back to him."<sup>17</sup> The latter, whose interest in the legend lies as much with Calliope the mother of Orpheus as with her son, says that it was by inspiration with Calliope's sacred harmony that Orpheus effectively convinced the gods to release

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<sup>17</sup>"Imperioque dei redditur uxor ei." The text of Gautier's poem has been published by M. Delbouille "un Mystérieux Ami de Marbode: le 'Redoutable Poète,' Gautier," Le Moyen Age VI (1951), p. 229.

his wife; once free, according to Godefroy, Eurydice fled from the portals of hell and the Furies.<sup>18</sup> Although the changed ending is handled abruptly by Gautier and Godefroy, and weakly by Thierry, one can see that these medieval Latin poets desired a happy ending for the story enough to overlook the inconsistency of their nominal method, the ornatus, with their actual method, which was to alter rather than to amplify.

According to Peter Dronke, a tradition of a happy ending for the Orpheus story was begun in the 11th century by the writers of such Latin poems. Dronke has found another version of a poem first printed by Meyer, which seems to depend on Godefroy in part and is much shorter, with a happy ending. The poem, which begins in Meyer's version, "Forma voce, lingua bona" has the Virgilian unhappy ending, but in Dronke's version--discovered, interestingly, on the first page of a manuscript of Gregory's Moralia

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<sup>18</sup>Text published by A. Boutemy, "Trois Oeuvres de Godefroid de Reims," Revue du Moyen Age Latin III (1947), p. 357. "Et redivivus fores erebi fugit atque furores."

in Job, there are a number of romance details as well as a happy ending.

For his looks and voice and eloquence,  
Orpheus alone among all Thracian men was  
loved uniquely by Eurydice. Overcome by  
his love, she longs to flee from all others,  
and while she flees from her pursuers, the  
harbinger of death seeks her with his bite,  
the serpent, crushed by her heel.

The lute's sweet melodies, which you  
temper, tuneful Calliope, compelled the  
oaks to follow that spirit--yet this does  
not succeed in removing the heart's sorrow.  
The poet laments, his one and only Eurydice  
is not there. He bewails Eurydice and then  
the lutanist brought back his one and only  
Eurydice.<sup>19</sup>

In this poem Orpheus' beauty has been made  
as important an attribute as his eloquence. These  
qualities, moreover, are no longer mere descriptive  
tags, but provide motivation for the narrative.  
Eurydice loves Orpheus because of his looks, voice

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<sup>19</sup>This poem is from MS Augsburg Bischofliches Ordinariat 5, Fol. 1r, published by Dronke, pp. 210ff. I use his translation. A companion piece in the Laurenziana MS from which Meyer took his version of "Forma voce" and beginning "O Fortuna Quantum est Mobilis," has been published by M. Delbouille, "Trois Poésies Latines Inédits," Mélanges Paul Thomas (Bruges, 1930). In it, Orpheus says of himself in the last stanza, "From hell I returned a widower" (p. 180). The poem is of particular interest because it lets Orpheus speak in the first person and sing a complaint--otherwise it is fairly conventional.

and eloquence, much in the same way that the lady of a romance might come to love, from a distance, the fine qualities of her knight. Love by reputation was to be the motivation in Robert Henryson's "Orpheus and Eurydice" when Eurydice, a rich queen of Thrace, is struck by the good report of Orpheus and sends for him to come and marry her. So, in "Forma voce," the author has substituted for a classical account of Orpheus the romance convention of the reputation of fame. Finally, Orpheus' lament in this poem is paraphrased--almost quoted--instead of being merely described in intensity and duration. It is only a step farther to the complaints, songs and dialogue of medieval romance which enter the Orpheus story with Sir Orfeo and Henryson's poem on the lovers.

As I said earlier, there were a variety of ways in which the story of Orpheus and Eurydice was suitable material for the vernacular romance. Only in one respect did it fail to conform to the romance schema and that was with regard to the ending of the story. In classical accounts of Orpheus he does not get Eurydice back and they do not live happily forever after

in the upper world. The medieval Latin poets discussed above were evidently perturbed by this sad finish to a tale of love and several of them changed it to conform to their own views of a good love story.

Why should it be that the medieval literary view of love material should differ so much from the classical? First, we might note that romance as a genre replaced the hero of classical epic with the heroine, and the all male audience with the female audience. In epic and in the French *Chanson de Geste*, the emphasis had been on masculine comradeship and the great blows the various heroes struck and received. When fighting is the most important human activity, life will be seen as a succession of personal encounters between antagonists in which every sword blow or spear thrust is remembered and elaborated on. And people must be killed.

But as the heroic story became chivalric, women became part of the action and of the audience. In epic, women had said goodbye to men as they went off to war and like Andromache, they wept when their men were killed; in romance men go to meet women and

usually only the villains or the followers of the hero not involved in love stories themselves are killed. Romance has a peacetime audience, and this audience, like the audience for the kitchen romances on the pages of the Saturday Evening Post, has no liking for tragedy; instead the romancer is interested in fighting which is motivated by and leads to the satisfactions of the passions of love. If the fighter is killed, the lovers cannot live happily ever after. Equally, the knight of romance undergoes arduous adventures, quests and tests for which he is rewarded by the hand of the lady, and so his lady must somehow remain alive until he gets to her dungeon or slays her threatening monster.

Thierry, Gautier, and Godefroy show that they were influenced by such conventions when they changed the Orpheus story to reward the hero at the end. Illustrators of medieval manuscripts as well, saw the legend of Orpheus and Eurydice as a romance which should have a happy ending or so we must infer from their works, which frequently provide one or--what is almost as telling--fail to illustrate the unhappy one.



In an illustration from John Lydgate's Fall of Princes (Fig. 11) Orpheus and Eurydice are courting; he seems to win her love by the power of music and there is no suggestion in the miniature of the death of Eurydice or her loss because of Orpheus' looking back.

Both Orpheus and his wife are dressed in aristocratic medieval costume and, as far as the painter was concerned, seem to be people of high degree in the most up to date fashions. Christine de Pisan wrote a work on courtly behaviour set in an Ovidian framework and called the Letter of Othea to Hector. In the text, which deals with the proper actions of the knight, Orpheus goes to the gates of hell in search of his wife. There is no suggestion that he gets her back. The author uses this story to show the knight that he should not search after temporalia and so be diverted from his proper course. The caption for the illustration of Orpheus' quest illustrates this idea for it reads "go not to the gates of hell" (Fig. 12). But the artist who illustrated the text seems to disagree with his author. In a scene very reminiscent of the

fairy landscape of Sir Orfeo, Orpheus stands in an enchanted land. Before him, Eurydice seems to be under a spell of enchantment rather than dead, since she sleeps peacefully on the ground while Orpheus plays the lyre which will, perhaps, awaken the sleeping beauty from her trance. The illustrations from Lydgate and Christine are ambiguous in meaning, but a miniature from B. M. Harley 4431 (Fig. 13) makes the happy ending quite clear. A very courtly Orpheus leads an entranced Eurydice away from hell by the power of his music and there is no suggestion in the picture that Eurydice is soon to return. Another miniature from a Christine de Pisan manuscript (Fig. 14) contains a series of pictures resembling a motion picture film strip in which Orpheus has delivered Eurydice from hell and leads her away from a Leviathan-like hell mouth; the devils atop the structure look rather baffled, and one gets the impression that they do not expect her back. The courtly clothes, attitudes and manners of Orpheus and Eurydice as well as the narrative implications themselves indicate that whatever the texts for which these illustrations were drawn may have said,

the artists conceived of the Orpheus legend as a chapter in a medieval romance.

Orpheus the Magician. There was a tradition of Orpheus as a wonder worker or magician which certainly contributed to the more elaborate romance treatments of his legend. Christine de Pisan hints at such an Orpheus in her Vision where she says that "Orpheus made such melodius sounds on the harp that by the proportions of his harmonies he cured several maladies and made sad men happy."<sup>20</sup> Here Christine may be thinking of how the young David cured Saul, but attributes this ability to Orpheus; perhaps also, she knew of the tradition of Orpheus-Artephius.

The attributes of Orpheus were assigned to a certain Artephius by Ristoro d'Arezzo in his Compositione de Mondo (1282). Ristoro is discussing man as a microcosm.

The great Artephius--miraculous philosopher, of whom it is stated that he understood the voices of birds and of the other animate creatures, who being in the woods at times in the great mountains playing

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<sup>20</sup>Lavision Christine, ed. Sister Mary L. Towner (Washington, D. C., 1932), p. 120.

for delight an instrument of his to which sound would gather the birds and other creatures of the place, according as it is stated and we have many times seen depicted by the learned artists: which creatures would go round him rejoicing and as if dancing and singing each one according to its own song.<sup>21</sup>

This passage is of interest since it associates Orpheus with a person who has magical powers and great wisdom and who lived in remote surroundings, but, more important, it tells us that this person was depicted by artists; Ristoro seems to suggest that the pictures were of a magical figure who may have had the attributes of other wizard-like persons.<sup>22</sup> Ristoro apparently

<sup>21</sup> See H. D. Austin, "Artephius-Orpheus," Speculum XII (1937), whose translation of Ristoro I have used.

<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately the picture of Orpheus presented by Albricus' mythographic handbook, the De Deorum Imaginibus Libellus, ed. A. Van Staveren in Auctores Mythographi Latini (Leyden, 1742), p. 924f. is rather conventional. Albricus says that "Orpheus is one of the number of the gods and so he was painted (pingebatur). He was a man in the clothes of a philosopher, a lyre vibrating in his hand. Before him were various wild animals who lick his feet--wolves, lions, bears, serpents. Various birds fly around him; mountains and trees bend towards him--he who--his wife following him--is seen to look back at her, but hell holds her." This synchronization of the two parts of the legend is presented in a manuscript illustration from the Libellus (Fig. 15) which departs from the description sufficiently to dress Orpheus in medieval garb, give him a veille or rebec and add a unicorn to the animals. The identity of Albricus has been discussed by Eleanor Rathbone, "Master Alberic of London,

derives the fusion of Orpheus and Artephius from the fact that the original wizard and magical master Artephius was supposed to have written a work on the voices of animals, and there is a detail in the Lithica, a late antique poem ascribed to Orpheus, which tells how a man may learn the voices of birds and animals by the use of a stone called *Αἰτλαροστός*.<sup>23</sup>

Orpheus the Minstrel. Constantine Africanus (1015-1087), Chaucer's "Cursed Monk" tells a story in which Orpheus appears as a kind of minstrel--in part a David healing Saul--and in part a wizard singer. The story appears in Adam of Fulda in a rather butchered version. Adam speaks of a Viatico of Rufus Constantinus "in which Orpheus by his music changed the heart of a prince from sadness to joy; he woke the sleepers; put

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Mythographus Tertius Vaticanus," Medieval and Renaissance Studies I (1941).

<sup>23</sup>Austin, op. cit., p. 254. Other versions of the Orpheus-Artephius confusion exist in medieval literature but they link Orpheus more with romance than with magic. In the Roman des Sept Sages, ed. Jean Misrahi (Paris, 1933), Prologue, 1.27ff. there is a reference to great musicians who played harps and viols. "And well have I heard it told" says the author, "how Alpheus the harper went to hell to get his wife." He concludes that it was Apollo and not Pluto who made the covenant with Alpheus.

to sleep the vigilant and cured melancholy."<sup>24</sup> The story is better told by Johannes Aegidius of Zamora, who quotes Constantine:

Orpheus said Emperors "invite me to their banquets, in order that they may gain delight from me, and I enjoy it too, when I can bend their souls from anger to pity."<sup>25</sup>

A suggestion of the idea of Orpheus as a minstrel occurs in Baudri of Bourgueil. He speaks of the custom of minstrels singing for their supper at the banquets of great men. In his poem to Odo, Bishop of Ostia, Baudri says, speaking of a banquet "inter cantores Orpheus alter ero."<sup>26</sup> And this seems to have been a familiar statement made by the dependent to his patron as early as Carolingian times, for Sedulius Scotus, in a request for more funds from his patron, said:

<sup>24</sup> Adam of Fulda, Musica, Gerbert III, 334. There is an informative article on Constantine Africanus, perhaps best known for his work De Coitu, by Maurice Bassan, "Chaucer's 'Cursed Monk.' Constantinus Africanus," in Medieval Studies XXIV (1962), p. 127ff.

<sup>25</sup> Ars Musica, Gerbert II, 392.

<sup>26</sup> Les Oeuvres Poétiques de Baudri de Bourgueil, ed. Phyllis Abrahams (Paris, 1926) CCXLIV, 24.

I am a writer, I am a musician and I am  
another Orpheus. But I am thirsty and  
would like some beer.<sup>27</sup>

The idea that Orpheus was himself a minstrel or professional singer occurs in a madrigal by Francesco Landini in which Orpheus is "singing" (cantando) of "Love's Divine Son."<sup>28</sup> The notion of Orpheus as a singer is implicit in the Ovidian account where Orpheus sings a song. Thus Orpheus was occasionally associated with the minstrel or itinerant singer and was, as we shall now see, sometimes the subject of their songs.

### Sir Orfeo

One of the finest of the non-cyclic medieval English romances is Sir Orfeo, an anonymous poem written about the end of the 13th century. This romance exists in three manuscripts, the earliest of

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<sup>27</sup> Sedulius Scotus, ii, 49 in Poet. Lat. Carol. III, MGH.

<sup>28</sup> See "Sy Dolce no Sono Chol' Lir' Orfeo" in Willi Apel and Archibald Davison, Historical Anthology of Music (Cambridge, Mass., 1949), pp. 57-59.

which, the Auchinleck manuscript in the Advocates' Library in Scotland, seems to be the best; the other two derive from it or a common archetype and are corrupt in many places.<sup>29</sup> The work is only a little over six-hundred lines long and could easily have been memorized by a minstrel, indeed the more corrupt later manuscripts may have been written from memory by a professional story teller.

The poem tells of King Orfeo of Winchester (née Thrace) and his wife Heurodis, their separation and eventual reunion. Heurodis, asleep at undern-tide or noon-day under a grafted tree, is visited by a fairy king from the other world who takes Heurodis there, returns her to the orchard where he found her and tells her that the next day he will carry her off to the fairy land forever. She is brought back to Orfeo in shock and the next day he comes to the orchard with a host of armed men to the same tree to defend his wife from the fairy king. In spite of her guard she is

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<sup>29</sup>The best edition of the poem is that of A. J. Bliss (Oxford, 1961). He discusses manuscript problems and gives a bibliography of the poem through 1954. All quotations from Sir Orfeo will come from this text.



taken off. Orfeo mourns and resolves to give over his kingdom to his steward and go to live in the woods. He becomes a hermit, his beard grows long and his clothes ragged. Where he used to eat delicacies he now eats roots. He still plays his harp, however, better than any man, and charms the animals of the woods. One day he sees sixty fairy ladies hunting and hawking by a stream and his wife among them. He follows them through a rock into a flat green land like Paradise, in the middle of which is a castle ornamented with precious stones. There he sees people whom men thought dead but who had been brought to the land of the fairies--some of them mutilated, burned or mad. He also sees his wife asleep under a grafted tree. Telling the porter of the castle that he is a minstrel, he gains entrance and sings before the fairy king and queen, so well that the king tells him to name his own reward, and he asks for Heurodis. Orfeo and his wife leave the fairy land to return to Winchester where they put up at the house of a beggar, and Orfeo, meeting his steward on the street, pretends to be a minstrel and

asks for food. The steward is generous and brings him to the court where he performs on his harp. Although the steward recognizes the harp as the property of his lost king, he does not recognize the bearded and ragged Orfeo. Orfeo tests the steward's loyalty by telling the company that he got the harp from a man killed by lions, and the steward, thinking that the king is dead, begins to mourn. Then Orfeo reveals himself, and he and his wife return to the court with music and rejoicing.

It is quickly evident that this account bears only slight resemblance to the traditional story of Orpheus and Eurydice as we see it in Ovid, Virgil or Boethius. The author of Sir Orfeo did not so much make a romance out of the classical story as create a new story which draws upon the Orpheus material we have been considering, taking from it some but certainly not all of its details. The gradual incursion into the traditional or classical story of a variety of biblical, popular, ethical, and literary materials has contributed to the fitting of the Orpheus legend for romance, and, as I shall try to demonstrate,

medieval commentaries on the legend provide a particularly interesting motif for this poem. But when we stop to examine Sir Orfeo we see that it relies more on the imagination of the author than on any one source.<sup>30</sup>

Though the poem has a number of features in common with Celtic otherworld legend and romance, as many authors have shown, it also has its share of details which belong to the transmuted classical, patristic and iconographic traditions of Orpheus which we have been examining. No single tradition is consistently developed throughout the work. For example,

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<sup>30</sup> A variety of sources, all conjectural, have been suggested for the narrative of Sir Orfeo. Those positions advanced before 1954 are summarized and discussed in Bliss's introduction. J. B. Severs, "Antecedents of Sir Orfeo," Studies in Honor of Albert Baugh (Philadelphia, 1961), sees influence mainly from Alfred's Boethius translation, Celtic legend and Walter Map's tale of the Knight of Little Britain in De Nugis Curialium. Constance Davies, "Classical Threads in 'Orfeo'" MLR LVI (1961) argues that the poem depends on a mixture of Map and Virgil, whose underworld has an elm of dreams and an architectural description of the gate of hell. She also sees a parallel between the abduction of Heurodis and seasonal abduction stories in Celtic legend such as the story of Culhwch and Olwen and the Vita Gildae. Dorena Allen, "Orpheus and Orfeo: the Dead and the Taken," Medium Aevum XXXIII (1964) suggests that the living dead people Orfeo sees may come from Irish legends of supernatural substitutions of dead people.

though the poem has often been connected with the kind of Celtic otherworld reached by crossing over water, the only water in the poem is a stream that the fairy women ride near and a moat around the castle in the fairy world. But these are phenomena natural to woods and castles of the time and do not seem to be significantly magical bodies of water. Latin legend supplies the names of the hero and heroine as well as the genealogy of Orfeo, But curiously, "His fader was comen of King Pluto,/ & his moder of King Juno" (ll.43-4). The author seems to have no idea that Pluto was the king of hell or indeed who these classical deities were, though he knows

Dat sum-time [they] were as godes y-hold  
(l.45).

Though Pluto was "kyng of Faÿerye" in Chaucer's Merchant's Tale (l.2227) and is curiously described as

Pluto, the elrich incubus,/ In cloke of  
grene, his court usit no sable,

in Dunbar's Golden Targe,<sup>31</sup> the author of Sir Orfeo

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<sup>31</sup>The Poems of William Dunbar, ed. W. M. Mackenzie (London, 1950), p. 116. In the 13th century poem Le Turnoiment d'Antecrist by Hugo de Berti, printed in Thomas Wright's edition of St. Patrick's Purgatory (London, 1844), p. 111, Pluto and Proserpine are the king

seems not to know the name of the king of fairy. He certainly does not connect Orpheus and Pluto as an author directly following a classical account might. On the other hand, the fact that Heurodis is seized at undern-tide is directly and I believe, consciously, related to the Patristic tradition I have been concerned with. Moreover, the word undern-tide associated with fairy activities occurs a number of times in the poem, and is a structural motif in a way that certain of the Celtic details are not.

The time of day during which the king of fairy comes to Heurodis and then takes her away, is, I think, the point at which we can see a connection between the medieval commentaries on the classical Orpheus legend and the plot of the Orfeo romance. The season of Heurodis' capture was May, a time of fairy activity and we should recall that medieval dream visions of other

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and queen of hell with a court made up of classical gods and demigods, biblical devils, and evil Christians.

beings and other worlds usually take place in May.

"Fresche May" becomes a personified being who speaks to the poet in Dunbar's Thistle and the Rose; in his Golden Targe, another dream vision poem, the action occurs in May. In Gower's Confessio Amantis, the lover has his long vision in that month.

We learn in Sir Orfeo that this particular May day was a very hot one and that " þis ich quen, Dame Herodis,/ Tok to maidens of priis,/ & went in an vndrentide/ To play bi an orchard-side" (11.63-6). A little further on we learn that the queen grew tired and slept under an "ympe-tre" till "after none, /þat vnder-tide was al y-done" (11.75-6). When Heurodis recounts the story of her visitation by the fairy king, she uses the same words: "As ich lay þis vnder-tide" (1.133). In order to prevent the abduction of his queen, Orfeo makes plans. "Amorwe þe vnder-tide is come,/ & Orfeo haþ his armes y-nome,/ & wele ten hundred kni3tes wiþ him" (11.181-3), but to no avail. When Orfeo is living as a wild man in the woods he frequently sees supernatural beings.

He mi3t se him bisides  
 (Oft in hot vnder-tides)  
 þe king o fairy wiþ his rout  
 Com to hunt him al about  
 Wiþ dim cri & bloweing. (ll.281-285)

When Orfeo gets to the world of the fairy king, he sees a number of people lying about before the castle --all taken from the world of men--"Ri3t as þai slepe her vnder-tides," (l.402) and among them is his queen Heurodis.

This seems to be an inordinate number of times to mention a certain hour of the day in any romance and particularly one as vague about time and space as Sir Orfeo. Bliss explains that the word "vnder-tide" means morning or noon.<sup>32</sup> I suggest that we take the word as meaning noon, and that the supernatural events which take place in this poem will thereby become more meaningful.

Psalm 90 (AV: 91), one of the most famous psalms of the Psalter, provides a possible, though

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<sup>32</sup>OED 2. gives a number of citations for undern as midday, though assigning the "vnder-tide" of Sir Orfeo to l. morning. Trevisa, it is mentioned in 2. translates Higden's L. nona meridiana as noon and Bartholomaeus Anglicus' De Nat. Prop. VIII, xxviii L. meridie as ME "undornetide."

admittedly conjectural explanation for the use of "vnder-tide" in Sir Orfeo. In verses 3-6 David asks God to "deliver me from the snare of the hunters . . . from hostile attack and from the noon-day demon (daemonio meridiano)." It was thought in Christian antiquity that demons were particularly powerful at noon-day because the heat of the sun directly overhead, in conjunction with a heavy meal, rendered man weaker than usual. Patristic writers elaborated this idea and went on to say that acedia or spiritual sloth threatens men, particularly cloistered and holy men, at noon.<sup>33</sup> Patristic commentaries on the Psalms are of particular interest. St. Augustine in his commentary was hard put to explain the noon-day demon. He said that we should take the "demon that destroyeth in the noon-day [as] a violent persecution."<sup>34</sup> But

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<sup>33</sup> Background on man's susceptibility to supernatural influence at noon-day has been collected by R. Cailliois "Les Démons de Midi," RHR CXV (1937). Rudolph Abesmann, O.S.A. discusses the idea in the works of the Fathers in "The 'Daemonium Meridianum' and Greek and Latin Patristic Exegesis," Traditio XIV (1958).

<sup>34</sup> Expositions on the Book of Psalms, PNF, p. 448. He is followed in this by Cassiodorus, Expositio in Psalterium, PL 70, 652.



many Christians who are persecuted, he goes on to say, "failed amid their torments under the blazing fire of persecution, as before the demon of noon-day and denied Christ" (p. 449). He concludes that one resists these demons by faith. Augustine's view became one of the two main interpretations during the Middle Ages (Arbesmann, p. 23). The other, and equally interesting view is that held by St. Jerome, who identified the noon-day demon as Satan come to tempt man from the true path, when he is weakest.<sup>35</sup> Richard of St. Victor explained that "cum summa luce et fervore daemones ad nos veniunt,"<sup>36</sup> and it should not be forgotten that in Milton's Paradise Lost, Satan enters the Garden in the heat of noon. I suggest, then, that Heurodis was particularly susceptible to the approach of the fairy king because he is to be seen as related to the noon-day demon. A number of points in the poem bear this idea out. When Orfeo

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<sup>35</sup> Tractatus sive Homiliae in Psalmos, ed. G. Morin, Anecdota Maredsolana, (Maredsous, 1897), pp. 115-117. See also Bernard of Clairvaux and Hugh of St. Cher, PL 183, 199 and Opera Omnia (Venice, 1703) II, 24lv.

<sup>36</sup> Adnotationes Mysticae in Psalmos, PL 196, 395.

first sees the king of the fairies with his host out in the woods, they are hunting at noon ("hot vnder-tides"); the emphasis on the heat in the description links the king with the noon-day demon in several ways. In a commentary on a line of the passage from the Vulgate in which the reference to the noon-day demon appears--specifically David's fear of the "snare of the hunters" (laqueo venantium), Remigius of Auxerre tells us that the "hunters are to be understood as the devil and his angels, who always, as though hunting, follow man, and try to trap him, catching him through his love for and desire of temporal things."<sup>37</sup> He explains that the noon-day demons are the fervid afflictions which cause men to fall (col. 627). The idea that the devil was a hunter was fairly common in the Middle Ages. St. Augustine, perhaps echoing the passage from Psalms, speaks of heretical ideas as the very "snares of the devil" (laquei diaboli, Conf. III, vi). It would not be difficult for a medieval reader familiar with these conventions--and the Psalms and their

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<sup>37</sup> Ennarationes in Psalmos, PL 131, 626.

commentaries were among the more popular Bible studies --to assume that the reason the fairy king appears at noon-time was that he was somehow related to the noon-day demon who in the heat of the day brings about man's fall through an appeal to his desires. Moreover, the fact that the fairy king and his men hunt at noon-day would have reinforced the identification.

But Heurodis was innocent of wrong doing and was not, so far as we learn, tempted, but rather taken off, quite inexplicably, at the will of the fairy king. Two possible explanations can be offered for her rap-tus. I shall present one now and one a little further on. If we substitute Eurydice for Heurodis, we see that the references to undern-tide and the possible identification of the fairy king with the noon-day demon who hunts men, become more clear.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Mortimer J. Donovan in an interesting article, "Herodis in the Auchinleck Sir Orfeo" Medium Aevum XXVII (1958) argues that Heurodis is to be associated with the evil Herodias who helped to bring about St. John the Baptist's death. He points out that in the Winchester Chronicle there is a reference to Edwy the unpopular son of Edmund who is described as a man with a "most ardent love of women and a man who followed Orpheus." Mr. Donovan refers to Edwy's queen as being thought a possible Herodias and connects this with Orpheus' looking back in

In Ovid, Eurydice, walking out shortly after marriage, with a group of naiads, was bitten by a snake and died. Virgil says, omitting the marriage, that she was fleeing Aristeus when she was bitten by a snake she stepped on. The author of Sir Orfeo changes the naiads to attendant maidens and has Heurodis go out to play in an orchard, a place which a Christian would be likely to associate with a snake. But no snake bites her; instead she is visited by the king of the fairies. If we assume that the fairy king becomes in the author's mind the devil who walks abroad at noon-day the story becomes clearer. First, as we recall from the preceding chapter, Eurydice was often seen in Ovid and Boethius commentaries as the human soul who, wandering through fields of temporalia, was bitten by the serpent and killed. Sometimes Eurydice was

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in the Consolation, where this action is castigated. But while the author of the Chronicle and the author of Sir Orfeo may have had this in mind, they were probably thinking of commentaries which would have established Eurydice as the carnal side of man's nature. Though the suggestion is interesting, there is not really too much in Sir Orfeo which would link Heurodis with the "wild ride" of banishment of Edwy's evil queen and a good deal which links her with the carnal concupiscence represented by Eurydice in the Boethius commentaries.

interpreted as the Church for whose sake Christ descended to hell. While I do not mean to say that the author of the romance had one of these commentaries in mind as he constructed his entire narrative, such interpretations were familiar enough to anyone knowing the Orpheus story at all that the author may well have had them in mind when he portrayed the king of fairy as a romance version of the devil-serpent who bit the errant Eurydice.

Iconographical evidence supports such a view. A number of manuscript illustrations which tell the story of Orpheus and Eurydice show her being bitten by a snake which is quite clearly a devil. An Ovide Moralisé miniature, B. N. Fr. 1493, (Fig. 16) shows Eurydice walking in a field, with a winged serpent or dragon--a popular representation of the devil, as well as an evil being in its own right--biting her heel. In an illustration for a Virgilian account of the story, B. N. Fr. 871 (Fig. 17), we see Eurydice either falling from the bite of a similar diabolic serpent or lying on the grass--the artist's handling of perspective making her intended position unclear--

while Aristeus, holding a shepherd's crook, looks on. The winged serpents of these pictures, though looking more like dogs, may be the medieval equivalent of the draconopede, a man-headed or sometimes animal-headed serpent. Vincent of Beauvais has noted that Satan in Eden was a kind of draconopede and that he tempted Eve in this guise.<sup>39</sup> In an Ovide Moralisé of about 1406, Lyon, 742 (Fig. 18), Eurydice is shown being bitten by a diabolical serpent as she lies, this time unmistakably at rest beneath a tree. A shepherdess' crook lies beside her and Aristeus, dressed as a herder, looks on. No explanation has been offered for the sleeping pose of Eurydice, and there is no mention of her sleeping or resting in the text. One possible reason for the artist's depiction of her thus might be that he felt a shepherdess would be likely to lie down during the heat of the day. But a more pertinent explanation, to my mind, would lie in the association of the serpent with the devil who was known to come upon unsuspecting souls when they were least able to resist--as the fairy king was to do with Eurydice.

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<sup>39</sup> Speculum Naturale (Venice, 1591) XX, 33.

The noon-day demon can be seen not only as a hunter of souls in his various guises as serpent and fairy king but also as a hunter of women. Aside from the possible confusion with Eurydice there was no narrative reason for Heurodis to be abducted by the fairy king. But there was legendary and biblical precedent for such abductions or attacks on innocent women by the devil. Certainly one might connect the fairy king with the demon lover of popular ballads--who was often the devil in disguise--but in the ballad, the demon lover carries off or kills an evil woman who deserves it. In the ballad "The Demon Lover" or in its various versions such as the "House Carpenter," the demon lover appears to his former sweet heart and tries to persuade her to go off from Ireland with him to a "merrie green land." The woman--who is soon revealed as grasping and unpleasant--is persuaded to abandon her husband and children for material gain because the demon lover has seven ships, many crew members and music on board. But shortly after they set sail the woman "espied his cloven foot" and realizes that the devil is carrying her off. The devil then sinks

the ship and drowns the woman.<sup>40</sup> But Heurodis is innocent of any wrong doing so that the demon lover of ballads has no hold over her. The devil in the guise of the fairy king, however, could abduct Heurodis for reasons of lust. In Genesis 6:2 we learn "that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose." The "sons of God" are the angels, who in the apocryphal Book of Enoch band together out of of lust, take as wives the daughters of men and teach them magic and forbidden knowledge. The women give birth to giants who turned against mankind and for their crimes the angels were driven from heaven and became devils.<sup>41</sup> In Hebrew demonology the spawn of the fallen angels were not only giants but all supernatural evil creatures including the pagan gods. This story seems to have been taken over into popular legend

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<sup>40</sup> See English and Scottish Ballads, ed. Francis J. Child (Boston, 1878) I, 201ff.

<sup>41</sup> See the Book of Enoch, tr. G. H. Schodde (Andover, Mass., 1882). That the Book of Enoch was known to the Latin west is made clear by a reference to it and to the story of the lustful angels by Hilar-  
ius, Comm. in Ps. CXXXII, PL 9, 748-749.



in the Middle Ages and supplies the idea that fairies were diabolical creatures who hunted women--particularly those who walked near trees and bushes--for reasons of lust. Chaucer alludes to such a story in the Wife of Bath's Tale, where we learn that in the days of King Arthur--which was the general time Sir Orfeo is set in--England was full of fairies. But when Christianity came and brought with it the friars, the fairies were driven out. Chaucer hints at a tradition of supernatural attacks on women when he says that "Wommen may go now sauflly up and doun./ In every bussh or under every tree/ Ther is noon oother incubus but he" (ll.878-880) meaning that friars have now replaced the fairies as hunters of women.

While the connection of the fairy-king with the devil is, as I have tried to show, made fairly pointed by the author of Sir Orfeo, this is not to imply that the whole tale is, at base, a Christian allegory. On the contrary, Sir Orfeo contains a variety of elements from many disparate sources, which are blended into an imaginative work of entertainment, rather than a tightly woven symbolic scheme. There

are, as can readily be seen, several biblical echoes in the poem--for example the similarities between St. John the Baptist's and Orfeo's trips to the wilderness--but such Christian overtones do not create any meaningful pattern; they serve rather to embellish the story. This holds particularly true of the otherworld description in the poem which might appear at first glance to contain pointed allusions to both Virgil's underworld and to the Christian regions of heaven and hell, but on closer investigation proves to be based on conventional otherworld description, and to lack a coherent symbolic structure in either pagan or Christian eschatology.

We would, of course, expect that medieval representations of any of these regions would furnish them with a certain number of medieval trappings, as would an illustration of any place which was distant in time or unknown to the illustrator. In the same way, our contemporary science fiction writers have peopled the planets of distant stars with anthropomorphic creatures who live, eat, and make wars in a manner only slightly different from that with

which we are familiar, and in this respect medieval versions of Paradise, the Virgilian locus amoenus and the Celtic otherworld are predictably similar. But beyond a simple medievalization of detail, it should be noted that in Sir Orfeo the land of the fairy is neither an afterworld nor an underworld. It is actually a by-world. The description of Orfeo's entry into it is unequivocal on this point:

In at a roche þe leuedis rideþ,  
 & he after, & nou3t abideþ.  
 When he was in þe roche y-go  
 Wele þre mile, oþer mo,  
 He com in-to a fair cuntray,  
 As bri3t so sonne on somers day,  
 Smoþe & plain & al grene  
 --Hille no dale nas þer non y-sene.  
 (ll.347-354)

Orfeo follows the ladies through a tunnel or cliff passageway. He does not go down into the bowels of the earth as Orpheus had in search of Eurydice, but rather to another land, joined to this one by a mysterious passageway. The idea that the world of the fairies was another but somehow parallel land is reinforced by the fact that Heurodis sleeps under an "ympe-tre" in that fairy world just as she

has in the world of Winchester.<sup>42</sup> The otherworld in Sir Orfeo, with its secret entrance, green plain, jeweled and radiant castle and unfortunate captives, is based on a variety of conventions from medieval art and literature. In its existence as a counter-world to that of men, and in its entrance, it seems most closely related to the otherworld of Celtic legend, which was also located on the earth rather than deep inside of it, and was entered by a number of ways, including through a mist, over water, or--closest to the Orfeo story--through a fairy barrow or mound.<sup>43</sup> The Virgilian underworld, on the other

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<sup>42</sup>The illustration for the Letter of Othea (Fig. 12) bears a closer resemblance to these features of the Sir Orfeo story than it does to the text it nominally portrays. In it we see Orpheus entering through a hole in a rock a mysterious land filled with curious animals, while Eurydice lies in a trance before a castle. But the illustration is for a version of the story which comes mostly from Ovid and Virgil. See Christine de Pisan, the Epistle of Othea to Hector or the Boke of Knyghthode, tr. Stephen Scrope and ed. George F. Warner (London, 1904) LXX, p. 78.

<sup>43</sup>See Howard Rollin Patch, The Other World (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), p. 27ff. and Theodore Spencer, "Chaucer's Hell: A Study in Medieval Convention," Speculum II (1927) for discussion and bibliography.

hand, was entered by a descensus through a cave, as we recall in the case of Aeneas and his sibyl guide, and in this respect does not correspond to the place described in Sir Orfeo.

What Virgil does seem to have contributed to this place is the conjunction side by side of happy and unhappy elements, and the presence of Orpheus in a beautiful, supernatural landscape. In Aeneid VI, 637, after having observed the unhappier shades, Aeneas crosses a "mid-space" and enters the gates of "a land of joy, the green pleasaunces and happy seats of the Blissful Groves. Here an ampler ether clothes the meads with roseate light, and they know their own sun . . ." Here Aeneas finds a sacred personage. The shades dance and sing and "the long-robed Thracian priest matches their measures with the seven clear notes, striking them now with his fingers, now with his ivory quill." The Thracian priest is Orpheus who plays his lyre to the people of these Blessed Groves.

The two-part underworld of Virgil was popularized and Christianized in the Middle Ages by such

legends as that of Barlaam and Ioasaph, the Vision of Tundale and the Cento of Falconia Proba. The 8th century account of the vision of Ioasaph by St. John Damascene, tells how after a long prayer Ioasaph falls asleep, and sees himself carried off

by 'certain dread men' through places he has never seen before. At last he stands in a great plain filled with flowers and fruits; the trees stir a breeze . . . golden thrones are here all set with precious stones . . . nearby are running waters, clear and delightful. He sees a radiant city surrounded by walls of gold, her streets filled with light . . . taken back across the plain again, he is carried to regions of darkness filled with every kind of woe. Here is a glowing furnace of fire, and the work of torment. This, he learns, is the place for sinners. tr. G. R. Woodward and H. Mattingly, p. 468ff.

The two part nature of the landscape as described here seems clearly to represent the conjunction of the Virgilian or classical locus amoenus with the Christian hell of torment. This story was popular in many languages and may well have been known to the author of Sir Orfeo.

Another, equally popular vision of the other-world was the Vision of Tundale, current in the Middle Ages from the 12th century on. Tundale seemingly

dies and his soul leaves his body for three days, going first to a dark and frightening valley where it sees souls suffering various Dantescan torments; it then, with the help of an angel, leaves this valley by crossing a bridge and comes to a locus amoenus where there were many souls and it was perpetual day. In this place were also a great tree and a wall made of precious stones.<sup>44</sup>

The illustration from the Flemish Christine de Pisan manuscript mentioned earlier (Fig. 14) separates hell itself from the locus amoenus by the use of the whale or fish-mouth common in medieval art and drama.<sup>45</sup> But this illustration shows a rocky and rather rugged country unlike the perfectly flat land described in Sir Orfeo.

The green plain of the fairy land is referred to in the poem as a "Paradise," and though we should not put too much stock in a word used

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<sup>44</sup>See Helinandus, PL 212, 1038ff.

<sup>45</sup>See M. D. Anderson, Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches (Cambridge, 1963), p. 88. See her figs. 6c and 8.

twice as a rime-word, it does seem as if the supernatural world of the fairies is related to certain Christian descriptions of Paradise such as that written by Falconia Proba in the curious mixture of Virgilian and Christian imagery called the Cento.<sup>46</sup> This poem along with the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation may well have supplied the author of the Pearl with his picture of Paradise and contributed some details to Sir Orfeo.

It may well be, though, that such supernatural landscapes were part of the convention of romance, for there are similar descriptions in Yonec, a lai of Marie de France, where a lady in search of her knight goes through a hole in a hill and comes out on a beautiful plain wherein is a silver-walled city.<sup>47</sup>

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the fairy landscape lies in what it is not--in how little resemblance it bears to the conventional underworlds

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<sup>46</sup>Cento Probae, CSEL, 11. 157-172.

<sup>47</sup>Marie de France, Lais, ed. A. Ewert (Oxford, 1960).



in which we have been accustomed to find Orpheus, with the enchanted Cerberus, stalled wheel and nourishing water. There is only a slight suggestion of any punitive or purgatorial region in Sir Orfeo.

Within the castle wall, Orfeo does find

. . . folM þat were þider y-brou3t,  
 & þou3t dede, & nare nou3t.  
 Sum stode wip-uten hade,  
 & sum non armes nade,  
 . . .  
 & wonder fele þer lay bisides:  
 Ri3t as þai slepe her vnder-tides  
 Eche was þus in þis warld y-nome,  
 Wip fairi þider y-come. (ll.389-404)

Constance Davies has suggested Virgil's underworld as a possible source for these people, but the parallels do not hold true in all respects. Aeneas sees a number of people who have died unhappily or in an untimely manner on his way to the Blessed Groves, an elm tree of false dreams which may explain the "ympe-tre" and a number of fierce personifications such as Age, Fear and Famine. But only in Deiphobus does he see a shade who is mutilated in the same way that the people are in Sir Orfeo. The other shades appear as simulacra of the people they represent, complete and intact. After all, it is difficult to carry on a conversation with a man whose head is missing.

A fairly acceptable explanation for the mysteriously torn men and women is provided in Sir Orfeo, though, in the form of the fairy king's threats to Heurodis. It is possible that what the fairy king threatens has actually transpired in the case of the people Orfeo finds within the castle walls. The king had told Heurodis when he returned her to the orchard wherein he found her, that she should be under the same tree the next day and that she should be taken by the fairies to live with them "euer-mo." If she hindered this plan in any way

. . . to-tore þine limes al,  
 þat noþing help þe no shal;  
 & bei þou best so to-torn,  
 3ete þou worst wiþ ous y-born.  
 (11.171-4)

It is curious that once the king of fairy has Heurodis--whether she be interpreted as the carnal side of man sunk in temporalia, or as the woman carried off by lustful devils, or as the queen abducted by supernatural beings for unexplained reasons --he does not seem to do much with her. When Orfeo comes into the castle he sees the king with his own fairy queen "fair & swete" and there is no sign of

domestic discord to suggest that Heurodis is being kept as a possible replacement for the present queen. Instead, Heurodis seems in suspended animation--a part of the fairy world but not really in it--as she lies under her tree. Perhaps the Orfeo poet in his attempt to blend the Orpheus and Eurydice of Latin legend and of the Boethius commentaries with the noon-day demon and the lustful fairies, was not able to make these characters sit comfortably enough together to work out all of the motivation for his narrative. But certainly he has shown what could be done by a skillful artist with the classical story and its moral commentaries--not merely elaborated as with other medieval poets--but completely rethought by the medieval mind to produce a vernacular work of entertainment.

Robert Henryson's

"Orpheus and Eurydice"

In Robert Henryson's poem of Orpheus and Eurydice are brought together the two strands of

medieval thought which had developed out of this legend--the romance tradition of secular literature, which we saw in Sir Orfeo, and the ethical tradition associated with the commentators and mythographers. These elements are blended in an imaginative work which displays a high level of literary craftsmanship and originality.

Robert Henryson, perhaps best known for his sequel to Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde called the Testament of Cresseid, was a Scottish author who was in daily life, a schoolmaster of Dunfermline. He was, though considerably influenced by Chaucer's poetry, of a much more stern and moralistic bent. This attitude towards life was revealed both in the elaborate moralitates he wrote for his translations of the Fables of Aesop and in the moralitas for his tale of Orpheus and Eurydice. Robert Henryson was born about 1450 and died about 1500. Since he was the last essentially medieval author known to me to mention Orpheus at any length, I feel it is fitting that this study should close with a

consideration of his poem "Orpheus and Eurydice."<sup>48</sup>

The poem is presented as a moral tale, with Orpheus' travels seen as a journey of education. Henryson begins with a trope in praise of the Greeks for their emulation of their fathers. After giving a genealogy of the Greek Orpheus, Henryson describes the birth of "king schir orpheouss" (l.45) and his proper upbringing which instills in him all of the virtues desirable for a medieval king. Hearing of his "noble fame" (l.73), the queen of Thrace sends for Orpheus and marries him amid great splendor. Their wedded bliss, however, is short-lived, for Eurydice fleeing Aristeus as in the Virgilian version of the story, is bitten by a snake and languishes in a "deidly swoun" (l.109) until Proserpine, the queen of the fairies, takes her off. Orpheus goes to the woods for a period of mourning, and then up to the heavens in search of his wife. Though he does not find her there, he does learn celestial harmony and

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<sup>48</sup>All quotations from Henryson's poem will be drawn from the most recent edition, The Poems and Fables of Robert Henryson, ed. H. Harvey Wood (London and Edinburgh, 1958).

have an opportunity to pay homage to Venus in her sphere. Then he goes to the underworld, by passing over a bridge, and plays before "king rodomantus" (1.308) and Proserpine and a company of historical personages including Hector, Julius Caesar, Croesus, Saul and Jezabel. Orpheus wins his Eurydice but then, unlike the romance hero, loses her by looking back. He realizes and ponders on the dangers of earthly love, and the poem ends with a moralitas of some two-hundred lines which is a direct translation of Trivet's commentary on the Orpheus meter in Boethius.

Orpheus, in keeping with his noble lineage, exhibits the qualities of knighthood very early: "No wondir wes thocht he wes fair and wyse,/ gentill and gud, full of liberalitie,/ his fader [being a] god" (11.65-7); he grows up looking as a medieval knight should and, in the courtly manner, earns the love of his lady from afar.

Incessand sone to manheid up he drew,  
off statur large, and frely fair of face;  
/H/is noble fame so far it sprang and grew,  
Till at the last t/h/e mighty quene of trace,  
excelland fair, haboundand in richness,  
a message send unto that prince so ying,  
Requyrand him to wed hir and be king. (11.71-77)

Another stanza is devoted to their marriage and newly wedded bliss. Medieval illustrators were not slow to paint the wedding of Orpheus from a medieval point of view, just as Henryson was not slow to elaborate on it. Two Ovide Moralisé manuscripts of the 15th century show curious marriage feasts, one, Lyon 742 (Fig. 19) shows Eurydice surrounded by revelers--Hymen, the god of marriage mentioned by Ovid--has become an angel who blesses the gathering from above. The other, B. N. Fr. 871 (Fig. 20), seems related to the Lyon MS in that Eurydice has the same symmetrical positioning of hands and the same ornament at her breast; curiously Orpheus seems one of her attendants as though he were a socially less important person, somewhat as he is in the Henryson poem.

Although Orpheus' marriage through reputation is purely a product of romance literary convention, Henryson combines it curiously with a Christian emphasis on domesticity which we noted in Sir Orfeo, celebrating a love within rather than, as was common in courtly love literature, outside marriage. So too, Henryson, like many of the ethical authors before him,

adds a gloss to this part of the story. He describes the newly weds' domestic bliss, and then observes sadly: "allace, quat sall I say?/ Lyk till a flour that plesandly will spring, quhilk fadis sone, and endis with myrnyng," echoing Job 14:2 where man "cometh forth like a flower and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow and continueth not."

Henryson shows his indebtedness to Sir Orfeo, to the Boethius commentaries and to Chaucer by quite consciously referring to a number of details about Orpheus and Eurydice, Pluto and Proserpine, found only in these works. For example, when the ill-fated Eurydice goes out walking, she is described as "erudices the quene,/ quhilk walkit furth in to a may mornnyng,/ Bot with a madyn, untill a medo grene" (ll.92-4). Though May, as was pointed out earlier, is a common time for the opening of vision poems, Henryson's piece is not a vision poem and the only other reference to a "queen" Eurydice who walks out in May that I know of is in Sir Orfeo. The "grene medow," on the other hand, reminds us of that meadow representing the whole earth--sometimes green and



sometimes dry--which we saw in the commentaries and mythographic handbooks. But Eurydice's being borne off by Proserpine would seem to derive from Chaucer's Merchant's Tale. The maiden tells Orpheus that Eurydice is with the "phary tane befoir my Ene" (1.119) and that when she fell into a swoon from the snake-bite, "the quene of fary/clawcht hir upsone (11.125-6) and took her off. There are no other references to Proserpine as queen of the fairies except by Chaucer. The king and queen of fairy in Sir Orfeo are unnamed.

Orpheus is very unhappy after his loss and takes his harp to the woods where he sings a plaint which reminds us a bit of the plaint of the Black Knight in Chaucer's Book of the Duchess. Orpheus' complaint is quite elaborate, has a refrain and includes much narrative material from the earlier story of Orfeo in the woods. For example, Henryson elaborates on the de casibus theme which the author of Sir Orfeo hinted at when he compared Orfeo's diet of roots and rude existence in the wood with his earlier mode of life as king. Henryson's Orpheus sings,

Fair weill my place, fair weill plesandis and play,  
 and wylcum woddis wyld and wilsum way,  
 my wicket werd in wildirness to ware;  
 my rob ryell, and all my riche array,  
 changit salbe in rude russet and grey,  
 my dyademe in till a hate of hair;  
 my bed salbe with bever, brok, and bair.  
 (11.154-60)

His period of mourning, however, seems not to have equalled that of Orfeo, who lived in the woods ten years or more. Henryson's Orpheus spends an unspecified time in his ascent to the spheres and then spends twenty days on the road going to the underworld. After an address to Apollo and Jupiter in which he asks them to help him find his wife, "he tuk his harp and on his breist can hing,/ Syne passit to the hevin, as sayis the fable" (11.185-6). He goes first to the milky way to seek his wife and then descends through each sphere, asking in turn of Eurydice. Unless there was some story of Orpheus' ascent to the upper world --as it is only hinted at in Trivet's commentary-- other than the standard accounts of Orpheus' translation to the stars in Hyginus and other astronomical writers, Henryson seems to have made up this incident from his own "fable." Henryson's story of Orpheus'

ascent most directly reminds us of Troilus and his journey to the stars during which he was able to look back on the little earth of men. Celestial voyages in visions or otherwise, were common in antique literature. They occur in gnostic lore, as we have discussed earlier, as well as in some of the Old Testament apocalypses and in the Somnium Scipionis. The King's Quair, however, has an ascent of the hero up through the spheres with an extended stop at the house of Venus, and it most probably supplied the impetus for Orpheus' journey. Orpheus reveals his romance connections and courtly sensibilities by stopping at his own proper "house," the sphere of Venus as he travels downward.

Quen he hir saw, he knelit and said thuss;  
 'wait ye nocht weill I am your awin trew knyght?  
 In luve none leler than schir orpheuss'  
 (11.206-7)

It is fitting that a hero who could sing of "Love's Divine Son" in a madrigal should be Venus' knight. Moreover, she more than other planetary deities would be helpful to a lover in quest of his beloved.

Though he did not discover his wife's whereabouts in this celestial voyage he did learn the harmony of the spheres, which Henryson takes time to outline for the audience.<sup>49</sup> Henryson may wish to imply by this that what Orpheus has lost in the way of a wife, he has gained in the form of cosmic knowledge.

Orpheus returning from the heavens, searches for his wife in hell, taming the various doorkeepers with his sweet song. Connecting this trip with the voyage to the Celtic otherworld is the fact that Orpheus passes over a river on a bridge--often a means of getting to the otherworld. After various adventures which follow the twelfth meter of Book Three of Boethius' Consolation quite closely, Orpheus comes to hell's house wherein are the king and queen, "rodomantus" and Proserpine. Around them is a curious company of historical persons. This villainous company includes Hector, Priam, Alexander, Antiochus, Julius

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<sup>49</sup> John Hollander, The Untuning of the Sky (Princeton, 1961) touches on the use of musical information in Henryson's poem as a prelude to the idea of divine music in the Renaissance, p. 85ff.

Caesar, Herod, Pilate, Croesus, Pharoah, Saul and Jezabel, all of whom are suffering appropriate torments reminiscent of Dante's Inferno, for hell's house also contains popes and cardinals guilty of simony and other ecclesiastical crimes.

Orpheus exchanges a few words with Pluto, who has been earlier in the poem referred to as "rodomantus," and persuades him by his song to return Eurydice. But there is no happy ending, for Orpheus looks back and loses his wife. The man who once called himself Venus' own knight now has come to see the danger of earthly affections and utters this apostrophe to love:

'Quat art thow, luve, how sall I the defyne?  
Bittir and suit, crewall and merciabile,  
plesand to sum, to uthir variable;  
hard is thy law, thy bandis unbreakable;  
Quho sservis the, thocht thay be nevir so trew,  
Perchance sum tyme thay sall haif causs to rew'  
(11.401-7)

The story ends here, with its hero a wiser man, by experience, than previous Orpheuses had been by hereditude. But Henryson does not conclude the poem until he has provided a moral in the form of Trivet's commentary on the Boethian Orpheus. He explains that

Orpheus does spiritually--get his wife back when he has learned to eschew the fleshly appetites and turn his eyes to heaven, as indeed the reader should do: "Than orpheus hes wone euridices,/ Quhen our desyre with ressoun makis pess,/ And seikis up to contemplatioun" (ll.616-18).

In Henryson's poem another Orpheus has been brought into existence from the medieval versions of the legend, distant, to be sure, from his classical original, but unmistakably the product of a long and noble line traceable all the way back to the Orpheus mentioned by Sappho some fourteen-hundred years earlier.

PLATE I



Fig. 1. Initial of King David.  
Hagiographic MS of the 13th  
century. Ambrosiana B. 32, 3r.



Fig. 2. Portrait of David from  
a psalter of the 11th century.  
Mount Athos Vatopedi 761.



Fig. 3. Portrait of David from  
a psalter of the 11th century.  
Ambrosiana M. 54 Supp. c.III r.



Fig. 4. David and Melodia.  
Psalter of the 11th century.  
B. N. Gr. Coislin 139.

PLATE II



Fig. 5. David and Melodia.  
Psalter of the 11th century.  
Vat. Cod. Barb. Gr. 320. 2r.



Fig. 6. Sibyl, Aeneas and Orpheus  
in the underworld. 6th century.  
Vat. Lat. 3225.



Fig. 7. The Nile god. Empire.  
Vatican Museum.



Fig. 9. Orpheus, from a homily  
of Gregory Nazianzen. Mount Athos  
Panteleimon 6, 165r. 11th century



Fig. 8. Orpheus as a sleeping  
river god. Cosmological illus-  
tration from Reims Mun. Bib.  
672. 13th century.



Fig. 10. Orpheus, from a homily  
of Gregory Nazianzen. B. N. Gr.  
Coiselin 239, 122v. 11th century



PLATE III



Fig. 11. Orpheus and Eurydice.  
John Lydgate, *Fall of Princes*.  
B.M. Harley 1776, 76v.



*Et in me aux portes d'Enfer*

Fig. 12. Orpheus and Eurydice.  
Christine de Pisan, *Letter of*  
*Orpheus to Hector*. Erlangen Univ.  
Bib. 2361, 88v.



Fig. 13. Orpheus and Eurydice.  
B. M. Harley 4431, 126v.



Fig. 14. Orpheus and Eurydice.  
Brussels Bib. Royale 9392, 73v.



Fig. 15. Orpheus, Eurydice and  
the animals. Albricus, *De De-*  
*orum Imaginibus Libellus*. Reg.  
Lat. 1290, 5r.



Fig. 16. Orpheus and Eurydice.  
*Ovide Moraliwe*, B.N. Fr. 1493,  
131r.

PLATE IV



Fig. 17. Eurydice. Ovide Moralise. B.N. Fr. 871, 196r.



Fig. 18. Eurydice. Ovide Moralise. Lyon 742, 166r.



Fig. 19. The marriage of Orpheus and Eurydice. Ovide Moralise. Lyon 742, 165v.



Fig. 20. The marriage of Orpheus and Eurydice. Ovide Moralise. B.N. Fr. 871, 196r.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- AJA = American Journal of Archeology.
- ANF = Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds.  
The Ante-Nicene Fathers.
- CIG = Corpus Inscriptionum Graecorum.
- CIL = Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum.
- CR = Classical Review.
- CSEL = Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum.
- FGH = F. Jacoby, ed. Fragmente der Griechischen  
Historiker.
- HTR = Harvard Theological Review.
- JTR = Journal of Roman Studies.
- JTS = Journal of Theological Studies.
- JWCI = Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes.
- MGH = Monumenta Germaniae Historica.
- MLR = Modern Language Review.
- OCD = Oxford Classical Dictionary.
- OED = Oxford English Dictionary.
- PG = J-P. Migne, ed. Patrologiae Cursus Completus:  
Series Graeca.

- PGM = Karl Preisendanz, ed. Papyri Graecae Magicae  
(Leipzig, 1928-1931).
- PL = J-P. Migne, ed. Patrologiae Cursus Completus:  
Series Latina.
- PMLA = Publications of the Modern Language Associa-  
tion of America.
- PNF = Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. The Post-  
Nicene Fathers.
- RA = Revue Archéologique.
- REL = Revue des Études Latines.
- RHR = Revue de l'Histoire des Religions.

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