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THE DERVENI THEOGONY: MANY QUESTIONS AND SOME ANSWERS*

ALBERTO BERNABÉ

I. PURPOSES

IN 1962 NEAR A TOMB IN DERVENI, near Salonica, among the remains of a funeral pyre, a scroll of papyrus was found.¹ It contained a curious text, an important part of which was devoted to the thorough commentary of some verses attributed to Orpheus. The scroll dates from between 340 and 320 BC² and the text it contains, from about 400 BC. The poem that is being commented on must be prior to 500 BC.³

All that remains of the Orphic poem is a series of quotations, more or less extensive. In a paper published in *Kernos*,⁴ I undertook a philological reconstruction of the poem. Now my purpose is to study the segments of the reconstructed text in depth. I will do it from a literary, religious, and philosophic perspective, with the intention of regaining a coherent meaning of the whole. The fragmentary and incomplete character of the text will not allow as much progress in the analysis as would be desirable; however, I think we must attempt to explain the text we have.

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¹ The papyrus has been recently edited by Casadesús 1995 (with translation into Catalan and commentary), Janko 2003 (with translation into English), Betegh 2004 (with translation into English and commentary), by Jourdan 2003 (with translation into French and commentary), and by Bernabé 2004b (with translation into Spanish and short commentaries). Ample bibliographies can be found in the complete edition of the Derveni papyrus by Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and Tsantsanoglou 2006, as well as in the fundamental work on the papyrus by Laks and Most 1997.

² So Tsantsanoglou and Parássoglou 1988:125, 1992:221. For other proposals, cf. Bernabé 2002.

³ Cf. Bernabé 2002 on the date of the text and possible identity of the author.

⁴ Bernabé 2002.

I will examine the literally quoted fragments, as well as the parts of the commentary that tell us something about the content of the text the commentator read but did not quote. The text and the numbering correspond to the ones of the edition of this theogony in the *Bibliotheca Teubneriana*.⁵ There and in the quoted *Kernos* article can be found the philological basis for the reconstruction of the text. The translation of the verses is Janko's (except where noted).

II. ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

Our analysis follows the order of the fragments and deals with the diverse problems of interpretation found in the text.

II.1. The Proem

The proem begins with a verse we know from other Orphic works and which seems to be a kind of σφραγίς of Orpheus (*OF* 3):⁶

φθέγξομαι οἷς θέμις ἐστί· θύρας δ' ἐπίθεσθε βέβηλοι.

I will speak for those entitled, close your doors, ye profane.⁷

Unlike proems such as those by Homer or Hesiod, where the poem is recited for any kind of public, this is directed at a few listeners, defined as those to whom it is licit to speak. The entitlement (θέμις) required to hear the poem specifically excludes the βέβηλοι "profane," who must (metaphorically) close their doors. βέβηλοι is usually opposed to "initiates," thus it seems clear that the condition for reading the poem is to be initiated. This implies:

a) That the hearer must have a previous knowledge about what is being talked about. This supposition is expressed in a clearer way in an alternative formula we find in the first verse of other Orphic poems: ἀείσω ξυνετοῖσιν· θύρας δ' ἐπίθεσθε βέβηλοι "I will sing for those of understanding."⁸ Consistent with this feature is the fact that some

⁵ I will quote this edition as *OF*.

⁶ Bernabé 1996.

⁷ Translation by West 1983:83.

⁸ Translation by West 1983:83.

substantial details of the story are only summarily mentioned⁹ and they require turning to other texts in order to be correctly interpreted.

b) That the hearer is in a certain state of religious character, which may involve moral or premoral conditions, perhaps having to do with Justice (compare the ancient references to Dike in Orphic texts¹⁰), or with purity (according to the declaration of the *mystai* in front of Persephone in the leaves of Thuri).¹¹

All this necessarily means that the poem is not *sensu stricto* an initiation poem, it does not offer the first information received by the person that is going to be integrated into the group of initiates, but it adds to the information previously received.

So far, everything seems clear; there are, however, two questions we cannot answer:

1) The first is the fact that the formula can be interpreted in two different ways: (a) the poem was only recited in front of initiates, in such a way that even access to the place where the text was recited and to the text itself was forbidden to the βέβηλοι, or (b) although the text could circulate without restrictions, it was directed only at the initiates, since only they were able to understand it. The later use of the formula by authors of technical works, which were distributed openly, but which could not be understood by everybody, makes the second interpretation more plausible.¹² The task of making the text understandable would fall to the sort of people mentioned by Plato:¹³

... ἀνδρῶν τε καὶ γυναικῶν σοφῶν περὶ τὰ θεῖα πράγματα
 ... τῶν ἱερέων τε καὶ τῶν ἱερειῶν ὅσοις μεμέληκε περὶ ὧν
 μεταχειρίζονται λόγον οἷοις τ' εἶναι διδόναι .

... from wise men and women who told of things divine . . .

⁹ I will later define this characteristic as “narrative speed.”

¹⁰ Pl. *Lg.* 716a (*OF* 32), *Ps.-D.* 25.11 (*OF* 33).

¹¹ *OF* 488–490. In a fragment of the *Rhapsodies* (*OF* 340) οἱ μὲν κ' εὐαγέωσιν are opposed to οἱ δ' ἄδικα ῥέξαντες. This implies that following Justice is a feature of the ritual purity among the Orphics, or, in other words, that acting against Justice means committing an impure act.

¹² Cf. Bernabé 1996.

¹³ Pl. *Men.* 81a, cf. Bernabé 1999. The relationship of the commentator with the people alluded to by Plato is pointed out by West 1997:84.

they are certain priests and priestesses who have studied so as to be able to give a reasoned account of their ministry.

Translation by W. R. M. Lamb

The Derveni commentator belongs to this group of people and, distantly, Plato himself, who often offers *sui generis* interpretations of Orphic texts.¹⁴

2) The second question would be which specific ritual our text is related to, whether it is really the *ιερός λόγος* of a ritual.¹⁵ Among other possibilities, we could consider the *θυηπολία* alluded to in the Platonic clause (Pl. R. 364e) οἷς θυηπολοῦσιν or any of the rituals commented on in the first section of the papyrus.

II.2. The Plan of the Work

The poet states what he is going to deal with in the poem (OF 4):

οἷ Διὸς ἐξεγένοντο [ὑπερμεν]έος βασιλῆος.

those who were born of Zeus the almighty king.

This sole verse is extremely significant, since we find several fundamental statements in it:

- a) Zeus' power is indisputable.
- b) The topic of the poem is precisely the birth of these gods (οἷ, nominative masculine plural, must refer to "gods").
- c) The gods were born of Zeus.

It is very illustrative to compare this verse with the one used by Hesiod in similar circumstances, that is, in the exposition of the plan of his *Theogony* (106):

οἷ Γῆς ἐξεγένοντο καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος

those that were born of Earth and starry Sky.

In both verses there is a relative pronoun as subject referring to the gods. Both verses use the same verb *ἐξεγένοντο*; that is, we are told

¹⁴ Cf. Bernabé 1997.

¹⁵ On *ιεροὶ λόγοι*, cf. Henrichs 2003.

about the origin of a γένος. In both verses this origin is expressed by means of a genitive (dependent on ἐξ-). Therefore, both talk about the origin of the gods' γένος. But Hesiod uses two genitives coordinated by καί; that is, he talks about a couple, the primeval couple, Earth and Sky, who are the ultimate origin of the gods' descent.

Thus, Orpheus differs from Hesiod in two fundamental aspects. The first, that he does not mention the female partner of the male god (neither here nor practically in the rest of the preserved poem). The second, that Zeus is considered as the origin of the gods' γένος, but he is not the first divinity, since, as we will see, he is preceded by three generations: Night-Sky-Kronos. Therefore, Orpheus, on the one hand, breaks the linearity of the story, beginning it with Zeus rather than from the first god, and on the other, he makes Zeus assume in some way not only the roles of king and father, but also that of mother.

II.3. Zeus' Seizure of Power

It seems that immediately after the previous verse¹⁶ began the action of the poem, marked by the presence of μέν *emphaticum* (OF 5).¹⁷

Ζεὺς μὲν ἐπεὶ δὴ πα[τρὸς ἐο]ῦ πάρα θε[σ]φατον ἀρχὴν
ἀ]λκὴν τ' ἐν χεῖρεσσι {ε}[λ]άβ[εν κ]α[ι] δαίμον[α] κυδρόν

When Zeus took from his father the predicted rule
and strength in his arms and the illustrious daimon

Orpheus situates us in the moment in which Zeus takes in his hands three things coming from his father. The metaphor “taking something in the hands” is often used for referring to the seizure of power.¹⁸ The direct objects depending on [λ]άβ[εν and coordinated by conjunctions are:

a) ἀρχήν, which clearly means “rule.” But the delight in the ambiguities of language is characteristic of the author of the Orphic poem. Since ἀρχή means also “beginning,” Orpheus suggests that Zeus takes

¹⁶ According to West 1983:114 and Betegh 2004:109.

¹⁷ As West 1983:84 and Calame 1967:67n3 have pointed out.

¹⁸ Cf. OF 168 and 170, and Casadesús 1995:274.

the ἀρχή from Kronos in two senses, in a hierarchical one (he becomes “the first,” that is, “the king” of gods) and also in a strictly temporal order, since immediately after he is going to go back in time, as we shall see. If this interpretation seems over-elaborate I refer to *OF* 14.1–2, where the poet makes the two senses explicit: Ζεὺς πρῶτος [γένετο] “Zeus was born first” and Ζεὺς κεφα[λή] “Zeus is head,” ending with a verbal echo of ἀρχή: (*OF* 14.4) Ζεὺς δ’ ἀρχός “Zeus ruler.”

In *OF* 5, the word ἀρχήν is modified by the adjective θε[σ]φαιον “predicted” or “spoken by gods”; it is therefore a destined power, legitimate, and within the order of things, not obtained by means of violence and injustice.

b) [ἀ]λκήν “strength.” Power is only a possibility, an ability, whereas it is strength that actually allows the god to exert power.

c) δαίμον[α] κυδρόν. This δαίμων can be none other than Zeus’ father, as is shown by the genitive πατρός in the first verse. Therefore, we can understand either “Zeus took . . . the predicted rule and strength in his arms and the illustrious daimon (in person)” or, more easily by means of a hendiadys, “Zeus took in his arms . . . the predicted rule and strength of the illustrious daimon.”

To sum up, Zeus seizes power and, at the same time, the ability to be the first in time. He also achieves the strength to exert power. The strength and power had belonged to his father, but now they belong to him with all legitimacy, because they have not being usurped.

II.4. The Visit to Night

Once he has seized power, Zeus goes to visit Night (*OF* 6):

[Ζεὺς μὲν . . .
ἦστο] πανομφεύουσα [θεῶν] τροφὸς ἀμβροσίη Νύξ:
. . . χρῆσαι . . . ἐξ ἀ[δύτοι]ο
ἦ δ’] ἔχρησεν ἅπαντα τά οἱ θε[μ]ις ἦν ἀνύσασ[θ]αι,
ὡς ἂν ἔ[χ]οι κά]τα καλὸν ἔδος νιφόνεντος Ὀλύμπου.

And Zeus [. . . came to the cave, where]
Night sat, who knows all the oracles, immortal nurse
of the gods.

. . . to prophesy from his shrine¹⁹.

She prophesied all that it was permitted him to achieve,²⁰
how he would hold the lovely seat in snowy Olympus.²¹

Zeus' purpose in visiting Night is to receive from her certain instructions, which have to do with the way in which he would seize power. This raises two questions. One, about the content of the predictions, and the other, why Night holds the key to what Zeus has to do.

As regards the first question, let us analyze what the poet says about the words told by Night to Zeus:

a) ἅπαντα τά οἱ θε[μικς ἦν ἀνύσασ]θαι "all that it was permitted him to achieve." By means of these words, the poet insists on the fact that Zeus' acts are licit. The topic is already Hesiodic.²²

b) ὡς ἂν ἔ[χοι κά]τα καλὸν ἔδος νιφόντος Ὀλύμπου "how he would hold the lovely seat in snowy Olympus." It is clear that "to hold the seat in Olympus" is a synonym for "to assume power," thus the sentence literally understood does not seem to make much sense. Zeus has already received the power from his father (OF 5), *ergo* he already occupies the seat of Olympus. The verb only makes sense if it means "how he would hold for ever," how he must act in order to keep it. The advice turns out to be necessary if we take into account that his ancestors, Sky and Kronos, have lost it one after the other. Furthermore, the procedure by which Zeus achieves this must be legitimate, since the ones used by his ancestors—castration and cannibalism—were not. For that reason they did not achieve their purpose of holding on to power. We will see later what procedure is used by Night.

As regards the second question, it is obvious that Night knows things that Zeus does not. She is defined as πανομφεύουσα [θεῶν] τροφὸς ἀμβροσίη. Let us analyze each of the epithets.

a) ἀμβροσίη is not significant. It is traditional and it is found in Homer: *Od.* 4.427 ἀμβροσίη νύξ, *Il.* 10.41 νύκτα δι' ἀμβροσίην, etc.

¹⁹ My own translation.

²⁰ "To hear" Janko (reading ἦεν ἀκοῦ]σαι).

²¹ "So that on snowy Olympus' lovely seat he rules" Janko.

²² Cf. *πέπρωτο* Hes. *Th.* 464 and the god's agreement in 883–885.

b) πανομφεύουσα “who knows all the oracles” is a *hapax*. It defines a quality proper of a primeval divinity. Night exists always, because she is beyond time, she knows everything from the beginning and has the key to the later development of things.²³

c) [θεῶν] τροφός “nurse of the gods” is also a quality belonging to a primeval divinity. She nurtures and guides the various gods who are going to intervene in the organization and government of the world.

However, we see that Night lives in an ἄδυτον. In all the later Orphic literature²⁴ Night’s ἄδυτον is a cave, and it is likely that it is so here too. If this is so, it is a space outside the social world, neither on earth nor in the sky. Night is not related to power. She never reigned herself, since her son, Sky, is the first to reign (OF 10.2 Οὐρανὸς Εὐφρονίδης, ὃς πρώτιστος βασιλευσεν).²⁵

To sum up, Zeus visits Night because he wants to know how he should act in order to keep power and to organize the world according to the natural order of things. Night’s knowledge of the whole process, and the fact that Zeus goes to ask her, shows that Zeus wants to follow the due order of things without mistakes.

But there is something more. The visit to Night is very effective as a literary device. In resorting to prophecy, the poet also insists on the role conferred on Zeus as the center of the narrative, as we shall see later.²⁶

II.5. Kronos’ Prophecy

There is also another prophecy attributed to Kronos, but we know nothing about it, since it is only alluded to in a verse (OF 7):

Ζεὺς μὲν ἐπεὶ δὴ πατρὸς ἐοῦ πάρα [θ]έσφατ’ ἀκούσα[ς],

When Zeus had heard his father’s prophecies

²³ Cf. Bernabé 1999.

²⁴ Procl. in *Ti.* 1.312.15 Diehl (OF 163), 3.169.15 Diehl (OF.164), Herm. in *Phdr.* 162.2 Couvr. (OF 211), cf. West 1983:213–214.

²⁵ Cf. Arist. *Met.* 1091b 4 (OF 20 IV) οἱ δὲ ποιηταὶ οἱ ἀρχαῖοι . . . βασιλεύειν καὶ ἄρχειν φασὶν οὐ τοὺς πρώτους, οἶον Νύκτα . . . ἀλλὰ τὸν Δία.

²⁶ III.2 below.

We find this topic also in the *Rhapsodies*,²⁷ but the testimony is indirect and the content of Kronos' predictions is unclear.²⁸

II.6. Zeus' Demiurgic Act

Zeus acts in accordance with the counsels received from Night and Kronos. His demiurgic act is, therefore, adequate, necessary, and within the proper order of things.

In *OF* 8 we see what the demiurgic act entails. The meaning of this verse has been very much discussed.²⁹

αἰδοῖον κατέπινεν, ὃς αἰθέρα ἔχθορε πρῶτος.

He ingested the penis of (. . .) that first procreated the ether.

The relative ὃς is masculine; thus its antecedent cannot be αἰδοῖον "penis," which is neuter.³⁰ The name of the possessor had to be in the previous verse.

We have to ask ourselves whose penis it is and where it was, but, above all, what is Zeus' purpose in swallowing it.

As regards the first question, we believe that the penis has to be Sky's. This supposition is based on the following reasons:

a) In fragment 12 appears the phrase πρωτογόνου βασιλέως αἰδοίου "of the penis of the first-born king."

b) This "first-born king" has to be Sky, cf. *OF* 10, Οὐρανὸς Εὐφρονίδης, ὃς πρῶτιστος βασίλευσεν. Night is the primeval divinity and she is not born, because she always exists. Sky is her son, so, logically, he is the first to be born. He is also the first to reign, because Night

²⁷ Cf. Procl. in *Cra.* 27, 21 Pasquali καὶ γὰρ ὁ μέγιστος Κρόνος ἄνωθεν τὰς τῶν νοήσεων ἀρχὰς ἐνδίδωσι τῷ δημιουργῶι καὶ ἐπιστατεῖ τῆς ὅλης δημιουργίας· διὸ καὶ δαίμονα αὐτὸν ὁ Ζεὺς καλεῖ παρ' Ὀρφεῖ ὄρθου δ' ἡμετέραν γενεήν, ἀριδείκετε δαῖμον' (*OF* 239), Dam. in *Prm.* 270 (III 12.11 Westerink) οὐχὶ δὲ καὶ Ὀρφεὺς ἐν τῷ Κρόνῳ ἐξάπτει τὰ πείσματα τῆς ὅλης δημιουργίας, Cf. also Procl. in *Ti.* I 207.1 Diehl, in *Alc.* 103a (60 Segonds), in *Cra.* 62.6 Pasquali.

²⁸ Casadesús 1995:296 considers it likely that Night gives her predictions, but that it is the father who provides the demiurgic principles.

²⁹ Cf. Bernabé 2002:105–112.

³⁰ I dismiss the possibility that αἰδοῖον could be an adjective, for the reasons pointed out in Bernabé 2002:106–107. I find unconvincing the arguments by Brisson 2003.

does not reign. Sky is designed by a matronymic, against the normal patronymic because he has no father.

c) In *OF* 10 appears the sentence ὃς μέγ' ἔρεξεν in the context of the transmission of power, without doubt an allusion to Sky's castration.

d) In the Hittite *Song of Kumarbi*, frequently quoted as a precedent of this Greek myth, the penis of Anu (that is, Sky) is devoured and the god who swallows it becomes pregnant.³¹

e) But, above all, we should take into account the testimony found in two other passages of the papyrus:

τοῦτον οὖν τὸν Κρόνον γενέσθαι φησὶν ἐκ τοῦ Ἥλιου τῆι Γῆι,
ὅτι αἰτίαν ἔσχε διὰ τὸν ἥλιον κρούεσθαι πρὸς ἄλληλα.

Col. XIV 2–3 (*OF* 9)

So (Orpheus) states that this “Kronos” was born to Earth by the sun [i.e. the penis of Sky], because he caused (the elements) to be “thrust” against each other on account of the sun.

ἐν τοῖς ἀ[ἰδοίοι]ις ὀρώων τῆγ γένεσιν τοὺς ἀνθρώπου[ς]
νομίζον[τας εἶ]ναι τούτῳ ἐχρήσατο, ἄνευ δὲ τῶν αἰδοίων [οὐ
γίν]εσθαι, αἰδοίῳι εἰκάσας τὸν ἥλιο[ν]

Col. XIII 8–10

He used this verse, likening the sun to a genital organ, because he saw that people think that procreation resides in the genital organs, and does not arise without the genital organs.

Leaving aside the etymological plays with Kronos' name, it is clear that the commentator interprets Sky's penis, swallowed by Zeus, as the sun. He based his interpretation on the invigorating character of the sun, which can be compared to the role played by the genitals. However, it is likely that he was influenced by the fact that Sky's penis must have been left in space after the castration. Ether, in its turn, was interpreted as Sky's ejaculation.³²

³¹ Cf. Bernabé 1987:139–155; Hoffner 1998:40–45 with bibliography.

³² Burkert 1999:82, cf. Burkert 2003:100 who compares this incident with the Egyptian myth in which Atum ejaculates Shu, something like bright Air, cf. also Bickel 1994:72–83.

Consequently, it seems probable that we must read at the end of the previous verse either πρωτογόνου βασιλῆος or Οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος (or Εὐφρονίδαο).³³

There remains the second question: why does Zeus swallow Sky's penis?

First of all we must understand that in archaic myths "having something in the belly" by swallowing and by gestation is the same thing. Taking this into account, it seems clear that Zeus' action is due to reasons that have to do with the genealogical line of succession and the recreation of the world.

a) It has to do with genealogy, because Zeus, as a supreme god, cannot have ancestors. This would be incompatible with his βασιληϊς τιμή, which consists of ἄρχειν. And ἄρχειν, as we know, means in Greek "to govern," but also "to be the first." In the human world, royal succession is logical because it is imposed by the death of the predecessor. In the world of the gods, who are immortal, the god coming afterward is less important than his predecessor. By swallowing (that is, by taking into his entrails) the penis of the first god, Zeus becomes a kind of father (or better, "mother") of him, a being that biologically precedes him, and thus he becomes the first, not only in the hierarchy, but the first in the genealogical order of all the gods. So Zeus restarts the history. This explanation of the mythical schema is confirmed by what is explicitly manifested in *OF* 14, which will be further analyzed later.

b) The fact that Zeus' act has also to do with the recreation of the world is clearly seen from *OF* 12:

τῶι δ' ἄρα πάντες
ἀθάνατοι προσέφυν μάκαρες θεοὶ ἠδὲ θέαιναι κτλ.

and on him were gestated³⁴
all the immortals, blessed gods and goddesses etc.

³³ βασιλῆος proposed by Burkert 1999:81, Οὐρανοῦ by Betegh 2004:118. The epithets are my own suggestion.

³⁴ "Grew" Janko.

τὸν Νοῦμ . . . Κρόνον ὀνομάσας μέγα ῥέξαι φησὶ τὸν Οὐρανόν·
ἀ[φα]ῖρηθῆναι γὰρ τῆμ βασιλείαν αὐτόγ.

after he has named Mind “Kronos” . . . (Orpheus) states that he “did a great deed” to Sky: for he states that (Sky) had his kingship taken away.

b) Sky is the son of Night (Εὐφρονίδης) and he was the very first to reign (because Night did not reign). The reference to the reign implies (and this is also unanimously accepted by most of the tradition) that the conflict between the gods is a conflict over power.

c) Sky is succeeded by Kronos, not only in the genealogy, but also in power.

d) Kronos is succeeded by Zeus and this is the end of the genealogy.

e) The complete genealogy includes (although the facts have been only outlined) Night-Sky-Kronos-Zeus. Phanes has no place in it and it is obvious that he is not mentioned in the poem. As I have pointed out before (II.6), Sky is named with a matronymic Εὐφρονίδης. If he were Phanes’ son, we would expect him to be named with a patronymic.³⁷ With the exception of Night as primeval mother, the rest of the story coincides in its fundamental features with the Hesiodic *Theogony*.

f) With the present participle κατέχ]ων, the poet insists on the fact that, at the same time as he receives power from his father, Zeus acquires two abilities related to that power:

1) First, he receives the μῆτις from the gods. The μῆτις is a complex concept that involves mental attitudes and intellectual behaviors. These behaviors combine astuteness, foresight, easygoingness, and the concealment, in addition to many other aspects, highlighted by Detienne and Vernant.³⁸ In Hesiod, Μῆτις appears personified as Zeus’ wife (*Th.* 886). The god swallows her when she is pregnant in order to avoid being deposed by the son who is going to be born of her (cf. 358). In later Orphic poetry, Metis, masculine, is identified with Eros-Phanes-Firstborn. Because of that, some authors supported that Metis

³⁷ For these reasons I cannot accept the arguments by Brisson 2003, repeated by Jourdan 2003:61–63.

³⁸ Detienne and Vernant 1974. Cf. also Scalera McClintock 1988:142, Casadesús 1996:75, Calame 1997:73.

was in our poem another name for Phanes.³⁹ But, as I have pointed out,⁴⁰ Phanes does not appear in the Theogony of Derveni. However, the interpretation of *μητις* as a common noun is perfectly acceptable.⁴¹

The Orphic poet reinterprets in a rationalized way the Hesiodic swallowing of the goddess Metis. By swallowing Sky's penis, Zeus assumes the necessary wit to reorganize creation. Thus, he also explains etymologically both the epithet *μητιετα* (OF 10.3) and the verb *μήσατο* (OF 16.1–2), which define Zeus' activity.

I wonder if the poet has also etymologically related *μήσατο* with *μήδεα* understood as a synonym of *αἰδοῖον*. We find exactly the inverse procedure in OF 189 dealing with the birth of Aphrodite:

μήδεα δ' ἐς πέλαγος πέσεν ὑψόθεν, ἀμφὶ δὲ τοῖσι
 λευκὸς ἐπιπλώουσιν ἐλίσσεται πάντοθεν ἀφρός·
 ἐν δὲ περιπλομέναισι ὥραισι Ἐνιαυτὸς ἔτικτεν
 παρθένον αἰδοίην, κτλ.

His genitals fell in the sea from above. Around them,
 as they were floating on the water, white foam rolled
 from every side.

Later, when the cycle of seasons was accomplished,
 Year fathered
 a venerable maiden, etc.

As in the Hesiodic model of this passage,⁴² there is here a double etymological allusion. On the one hand, Aphrodite's name is related with *ἀφρός* "foam"; on the other hand, the epithet *αἰδοίη* is explained by the circumstance that the goddess came from Sky's genitals (*μήδεα*, understood as a synonymus of *αἰδοῖον*).⁴³

2) But, in addition to the *μητις*, Zeus receives "the contrivance and kingly honor of the gods," that is, the status that allows him to legitimately use the wit he possesses. He has, therefore, both a plan to restructure the world and the "legal" or institutional capacity to do so.

³⁹ West 1983:88; 114.

⁴⁰ Cf. II.6 above and Bernabé 2002:105–112.

⁴¹ Cf. the convincing argumentation by Betegh 2004:113–115.

⁴² Hes. *Th.* 188–198. Cf. commentary by West to verses 154–210, p211–227.

⁴³ Cf. Edwards 1991:205–206.

I can say nothing about the continuation, where only the word ἰναῖς “sinews” can be read. Its justification in this context remains absolutely enigmatic to me.

The digression in the form of a flashback about the events preceding the story is concluded at that point in ring-composition.⁴⁴ The poet returns to the topic of the swallowing of the penis in order to narrate the consequences of Zeus’ cosmic pregnancy.

II.8. The Flashback Device

I consider it pertinent to say a few words about the rhetorical device of flashback. As is well known, it is not new, since the *Odyssey* already began *in medias res*, going back from a later point to tell the previous story.

It is interesting to analyze the purposes of the use of this procedure in our poem. By narrating the facts in this order, the poet turns Zeus into the highlighted point, the focus of narration. Zeus is the center, around which a “before” and an “after” converge. The two are symmetrical: the “before” is the sequence Night-Sky-Kronos, who carried out the first organization of the world, and the “after” is the recreation of the world.

This purpose of turning Zeus into the center of the poem, and correlatively, placing him in center of the universe is supported by the use of other rhetorical devices. The poet’s reference to Night’s prediction insists on this role of Zeus. The god is the centre of the plot, since he resorts to the goddess of the past (Night) to organize the future. Also the hymn to Zeus that appears as a climax emphasizes this “central” character of the god. But I will return to this question.⁴⁵

On the other hand, we could find in this technique of narrating a way of conceiving the history of the universe that is different from the Hesiodic one. The Boeotian poet presents us with a linear history.⁴⁶ After the opening of Chaos and the successive seizure of power by each god comes Zeus’ reign, and in the process there is not any kind of going

⁴⁴ Betegh 2004:131.

⁴⁵ II.9 below.

⁴⁶ Cf. Bernabé 1990:72.

back. Orpheus, however, offers us a different developmental model of the history of the world's configuration which comprises the notion of return; it is a regressive model, as we shall see later. The narration in flashback helps create this impression of going back.⁴⁷

II.9. The Cosmic Pregnancy

Zeus' cosmic pregnancy is described in a fragment of four verses (*OF* 12):

πρωτογόνου βασιλέως αἰδοίου, τῷ δ' ἄρα πάντες
 ἀθάνατοι προσέφυγ μάκαρες θεοὶ ἠδὲ θέαιναι
 καὶ ποταμοὶ καὶ κρήναι ἐπήρατοι ἄλλα τε πάντα,
 ἄσσα τότε ἦν γεγαῶτ', αὐτὸς δ' ἄρα μῶνος ἔγεντο.

of the penis of the first-born king. And on him were
 gestated⁴⁸
 all the immortals, blessed gods and goddesses
 the rivers, lovely springs and everything else
 that had then been born; he himself alone became.

By absorbing the immense generating capacity of Sky's penis, Zeus becomes pregnant with the gods and goddesses that would have to be born (and in many cases, that would have to be reborn). Thus the statement of the "program" of the work (*OF* 4) is fully confirmed.

οἳ δὲ Διὸς ἐξεγένοντο [ὑπερμεν]έος βασιλῆος.

those who were born of Zeus the almighty king

Zeus, invested with regal sovereignty and pregnant with the world, returns to the origins and restarts the history of the universe; he becomes a kind of universal "mother," who is going to give birth to the gods again, but not only to them. He will also generate the rivers

⁴⁷ It would be hazardous to affirm that this regressive view could be related to the Orphic idea, known from later works, according to which the soul also suffers a cycle of fall and return.

⁴⁸ "Grew" Janko.

and all the rest; that is, he restarts not only the theogony, but also the cosmogony.

Regrettably, we do not have in the preserved part of the poem any allusion to the way in which the world was organized the first time. Maybe this topic was not even alluded to in the work, but only supposed. However, it seems clear that the one (Night) became many (since Sky, and presumably Earth too, were born of her; Kronos and probably at least Rhea too, were born of Sky and Earth, and finally, of Kronos and Rhea was born, at least, Zeus). The fact is that with the swallowing of Sky's penis, now the driving force of evolution is a foreign active principle that seems to be new: Zeus' intelligence (μῆτις). As has been mentioned already (II.8.), the evolution is regressive, since the many, when Sky's penis is swallowed by Zeus, become again one in the god. The model adopted by Orpheus to deal with the topic of one and many is similar to the one used by Empedocles.⁴⁹ But the difference is that Empedocles' model is cyclical (the return from the reign of Love to that of Hate and vice versa is not stopped but is repeated again and again), while it seems clear that for Orpheus Zeus' regression gives rise to a situation that is stabilized later. The following verse clearly shows this circumstance, at the same time as it reveals that this new creation has to do also with power (OF 13):

νῦν δ' ἐστὶ]ν βασιλεὺς] πάντ[ων, καὶ τ' ἔσσει' ἔπ]ειτα.

now he is king of all and will be in future.

The poet insists on the fact that Zeus has the power over the whole universe and holds it forever. The distribution of divine power has become stabilized. The fights for power have finished and the definite order has been achieved.

⁴⁹ West 1983:108, following a suggestion by Burkert in a letter to him dated 31 July 1971. On the relationship between Empedocles and Orphism, cf. Riedweg 1995 and on the models of evolution from one to many, cf. Bernabé 1998b. Betegh 2001 points out similarities between Empedocles' cosmic cycle and the plot of the Derveni theogony.

II.10. The Climax of the Poem: The Hymn to Zeus

We find in this poem a brief hymn to Zeus,⁵⁰ which gives expression to all that the god has become (OF 14):

Ζεὺς πρῶτος [γένετο, Ζεὺς] ὕστατος [ἀργικέραυτος·
 Ζεὺς κεφα[λή, Ζεὺς μέσ]σα, Διὸς δ' ἐκ [π]άντα τέτ[υκται·
 Ζεὺς πνοιή πάντων, Ζεὺς πάντων ἔπλετο] μοῖρα·
 Ζεὺς βασιλεύς, Ζεὺς δ' ἀρχὸς ἀπάντων ἀργικέραυτος.

Zeus was born first, Zeus of the shining bolt was last,
 Zeus is head, Zeus is center, all things are from Zeus.
 Zeus is the breath of all, Zeus the Moira of all.
 Zeus the king, Zeus ruler of all, he of the shining bolt.

The poet insists on Zeus' central position in the organization of the world. Once he has acquired the knowledge from Night (the first ancestor), the immense generative capacity from Sky (his second ancestor) by swallowing his penis, and the power from Kronos (his father), he has become the absolute center. He has concentrated knowledge and power, he has assumed the previous history and started the later history. The unity of this center of four verses is reinforced by a formal feature: the use of the same epithet ἀργικέραυτος (however traditional, and not very significant in this context) in the first and in the last of them.

Zeus' central character is expressed by means of a series of sentences. In the first verse, the change of situation is defined, marked by the verb γένετο. Paradoxically, the change of situation leads to two opposite statements (πρῶτος [γένετο . . .] ὕστατος "was born first . . . last"). In the other three verses, the name of the god, repeated, is defined by a series of substantives. The second verse persists in the paradoxical expression of the first one (Ζεὺς κεφα[λή, Ζεὺς μέσ]σα "Zeus is head, Zeus is center"). However, the contradictions predicated of Zeus in the first two verses are only apparent. In Zeus, the opposites

⁵⁰ Cf. the expanded versions quoted by the author of *De mundo* (OF 31) and by the Neoplatonic philosophers (OF 243).

predicated are harmoniously integrated, in a form of expression that reminds us of some formulations by Heraclitus.⁵¹

To finish the purely formal analysis, It is worth paying attention to the reiteration of the adjective “all,” which appears four times (2 [π]άντα, 3 πάντων . . . πάντων, 4 ἀπάντων). Also in verse 2, the chiasm πνοιῆ πάντων Ζεὺς πάντων . . . μοῖρα stresses again with anaphoric insistence Zeus’ “central” character.

Let us analyze each of the characteristics that are attributed to Zeus:

a) Ζεὺς πρῶτος [γένετο, Ζεὺς] ὕστατος. Zeus is the last in the genealogy Night-Sky-Kronos-Zeus, but he has swallowed (integrated into his “womb”) the penis of the first-born, Sky. He becomes pregnant with the whole cosmos and gestates it again. With this loop in the linearity of time, Zeus becomes the first god of the recreated world. Thus the regressive model of the poem’s history of the universe, which I discussed earlier, is explicitly realized.

b) Ζεὺς κεφα[λή, Ζεὺς μέσ]σα, Zeus is the head because he is the one who governs. However, by saying that Zeus is also center, Orpheus makes explicit Zeus’ central position, both in the poem and in the world itself, to which I have referred above.

c) Διὸς δ’ ἐκ [π]άντα τέτ[υκται]. The verb τεύχω means “produce by work or art,” especially of material things (LSJ I1).⁵² The perfect participle τετυγμένος has the value “well-wrought” (LSJ I2). Therefore, according to the poet, the world is the well-made handiwork of Zeus, resulting from his μῆτις. The perfect tense emphasizes the stable and accomplished result of Zeus’ work. He in his turn is the divine craftsman. The god that forms the world is the most direct precedent of the Platonic demiurge, a powerful original idea in the Greek world.

d) [Ζεὺς πνοιῆ πάντων Ζεὺς πάντων ἔπλετο] μοῖρα. Zeus is considered as a kind of revitalising breath of the world, similar to the air of Diogenes of Apollonia or even to Anaximenes’ ἀήρ. On the other hand,

⁵¹ Heraclit. fr. 77 Marcovich (B 67 D.-K.) ὁ θεὸς ἡμέρη εὐφρόνη, χειμῶν θέρος, πόλεμος εἰρήνη, κόρος λιμός κτλ.

⁵² The reading τελείται, proposed by Diels (but cf. Schol. Galen. I.363 ap. Moraux 1977:22) probably arose from an attempt to reinforce the contrast between κεφαλή understood as “principle” and the idea of “end.” Cf. Magnelli 1994.

Zeus, as recreator of the world, has in himself the whole plan of the universe and, therefore, he knows its fate.⁵³

e) Ζεὺς βασιλεύς, Ζεὺς δ' ἀρχὸς ἀπάντων, The brief hymn finishes with a new reference to Zeus' absolute power. Βασιλεύς and ἀρχός seem to be synonyms, but they are not, if we see in ἀρχός a perceivable double sense between the two senses of ἄρχω, "to govern" and "to be the first" (in an order). Let us remember what has been said about ἀρχή in *OF* 5. The genitive ἀπάντων, whose significance is reinforced by the reiteration of the adjective in the passage, closes this comprehensive definition of the god as the beginning, the center, the divine craftsman of the world, who indisputably governs over his creation, the breath of the universe, and the destiny of all things.

II.11. The Recreation of the World

We would expect that the poet had included a kind of transition between the hymn to Zeus and the reference to the reappearance of the gods and the components of the world, given birth by the god. West⁵⁴ sets here *exempli gratia* the last verses of the *Hymn to Zeus* known by the author of *De mundo*:⁵⁵

πάντας γὰρ κρύψας αὐθις φάος ἐς πολυγηθῆς
ἐξ ἱερῆς κραδῖης ἀνενέγκατο, μέμμερα ῥέζω

after he had hidden them all away, again into the glad
light
from his holy heart he brought them up, performing
mighty acts.⁵⁶

However, the commentator does not seem very much interested in most of the details of the recreation of the world by Zeus, and if

⁵³ This is the only possible reference to human history in the whole poem. This designation has to do also with the fact that Zeus is responsible for the organization of time, as Calame 1997:74 points out. According to Alderink 1981:28, "Moira is an attribute of Zeus and not external to him." Cf. also Ricchiardelli 1980, Casadesús 1995:381–383, Jourdan 2003:80–82, and Betegh 2004:200–202.

⁵⁴ West 1983:115

⁵⁵ *OF* 31.

⁵⁶ Translation by West 1983:90.

these same verses, or others similar to them, existed in the poem he is commenting on, he chose not say a word about them.

By recreating the world in an organized way, Zeus appears as a demi-urgic god,⁵⁷ who has just become pregnant with the whole universe and has to give birth to it again, following his μήτις.

It seems that he bears Aphrodite first, although we depend on indirect and not very explicit quotations. By all indications, he does it by ejaculation, if this is indeed the meaning we have to apply to the strange word θόρνη.⁵⁸

‘θορνηι’ δὲ λέγ[ων] δηλοῖ ὅτι ἐν τῷ ἀέρι κατὰ μικρὰ μεμερισμένα ἐκινεῖτο καὶ ἐθόρνυτο . . . Ἀφροδίτη Οὐρανία καὶ Ζεὺς καὶ {ἀφροδισιάζειν καὶ θόρνυσθαι καὶ} Πειθῶ καὶ Ἀρμονία τῷ αὐτῷ θεῷ ὄνομα κεῖται. ἀνὴρ γυναικὶ μισγόμενος ἀφροδισιάζειν λέγεται κατὰ φάτιν.

OF 15 col. XXI 1–9

. . . saying “by an ejaculation”⁵⁹ (Orpheus) reveals that (the elements), divided into little bits, moved and “mounted” in the Air . . . Heavenly Aphrodite, Zeus, Persuasion, and Harmony are conventional names for the same God. A man uniting sexually with a woman is said to “aphrodize,” as the saying goes.

It is without doubt Zeus who ejaculates the goddess. Aphrodite’s birth has to be situated at the beginning of recreation, since it is necessary to have a god responsible for sexual reproduction, so that the new created gods can have sexual intercourse. Persuasion and Harmony would be personifications of the goddess’ retinue, similar to the ones we find in Hesiod.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Alderink 1981:30 defines this account as “a ‘monistic’ account on the origin of the world.” On the creator among Orphics, cf. Guthrie 1952:107–108, Classen 1962:9–10, Alderink 1981:25–36, Parker 1995:492.

⁵⁸ About θόρνη cf. the proposals quoted by Bernabé 2002:118–119n132. Janko 2002:40 reconstructs the fragment: [Ζεὺς₁ [γεῖνατο] ἰθορνηι₁] / [ἰΠειθῶ₁, [θ¹] ἰ Ἀρμονίην₁ [τε καὶ] ἰΟὐρανίην Ἀφροδίτην₁].

⁵⁹ West 1983:91; Janko “(when Zeus) mounted.”

⁶⁰ Cf. Hes. *Th.* 201, where Ἔρος and Ἴμερος appear.

Later Zeus undertakes the recreation of the rest of gods (*OF* 16):

μήσατο δ' αὖ Γαίαν [τε καί] Οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν [ὑπερθεν,
μήσατο δ' Ὀκεανοῖο μέγα σθένος εὐρὺ ῥέοντος·
ἴνας δ' ἐγκατέλεξ' Ἀχελωίου ἀργυροδίνεω,
ἐξ οὗ πᾶσα θάλασ[σα

He contrived the Earth and wide Sky above⁶¹
and contrived the great strength of wide-flowing Okeanos,
he puts in the might of silver-swirling Acheloüs,
from which all seas came⁶²

Sky and Earth were born before Zeus, in the same way as in Hesiod, but now they appear again reborn. Zeus starts again the generation of the universe from the beginning. He generates also Okeanos and the primeval waters that sustain him, like the tendons sustain the body.

The most interesting thing is the repeated use (here and in *OF* 18) of the verb μήσατο “contrived.”⁶³ Zeus appears as a demiurge who makes the world according to a rational plan, ordered, insofar as it is preconceived and intelligent, as opposed to the previous situation, which was supposedly more “chaotic,” dominated by violence and disorder. Zeus’ creation is a “nuova creazione maschile e intellettuale,”⁶⁴ or better, “a mental act of planning and contriving, and not real ‘creationism.’”⁶⁵ As we know Zeus is μητίετα because by his swallowing he has assumed in addition to the power of the gods his wit (μητις *OF* 11). There is here a clear etymological relationship highlighted by the poet.

Among the preserved fragments about the creation of the world, we have a reference to the generation of the Moon (*OF* 17):

⁶¹ My own translation.

⁶² My own translation.

⁶³ We find a similar sentence in Parm. 28 B 13 D.-K. πρώτιστον μὲν Ἔρωτα θεῶν μητίετο πάντων (cf. West 1983:109, Burkert 1998:390n18) see also B 38 Ζεὺς μήδετο ἔργα, etc. and Jourdan 2003:23n2.

⁶⁴ Scalera McClintock 1988:143.

⁶⁵ Tarán 1971:407n162 (cf. his note to Parm. B 13). See also Burkert 1968:102n16, 1969:3n7, 1997:173, Schwabl 1978:1330, Ricciardelli Apicella 1980:125–126 and n82, Casadesús 1995:453.

] ἰσομελῆς⁶⁶ [
ἢ πολλοῖς φαίνει μερόπεσσι ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαίαν.

equal-limbed (Moon) . . .
who shines for many mortals across the endless Earth.

The Moon is intimately related to time's measuring since it marks a basic unit: the month. So Zeus introduces also in his creation the chronological ordering of the universe. The logic of things makes us suppose that he would also create the Sun as guarantor of the course of the years, but this is just a plausible conjecture. In later Orphic theogonies Time appears as character in the beginning of the cosmogony, but he is clearly absent from our poem.

II.12. The Incest

The story takes then a curious direction (OF 18):

αὐτ'ἄρ [ἐ]πεὶ δ[ὴ πάν]τα Διὸς φρήν μή]σατ[ο ἔ]ργα,
ἥθελε μητρὸς ἑᾶς μιχθήμεναι ἐν φιλότῃτι.

But when the mind of Zeus had contrived all deeds⁶⁷
Zeus wished to unite with his mother in love.

The first verse functions as a transition to the new episode, to which the poet passes with his usual narrative speed. He indicates that the process of creation of the world is closed (the adjective πάν]τα appears again). The whole process is due to the god's φρήν and it is defined as something that the god has intellectually conceived (again, the verb μή]σατο).

The second verse tells us that the god wants now to unite with his mother. Although he does not say her name, she has to be Rhea, as in the common tradition. Furthermore, Rhea in the *Rhapsodies* is identified with Demeter.⁶⁸ In the commentary, Rhea is also identified with

⁶⁶ Perhaps we can read (with West 1983:115) μεσσόθεν] ἰσομελῆς [πάντη.

⁶⁷ My own translation.

⁶⁸ Cf. OF 206 ῥεῖη τὸ πρὶν εὐϋσα, ἐπεὶ Διὸς ἔπλετο μήτηρ, / Δημήτηρ γέγονε "who formerly was Rhea, when she was Zeus' mother, she became Demeter."

Demeter and with Mother Earth,⁶⁹ but we do not know whether this identification is due to something expressed in the poem or is just the result of the analytic work of the commentator.

We have to observe that if Zeus had harbored inside of him all the gods (*OF* 12), we suppose that he had also harbored his mother. And if he had generated Sky in the new creation of the world, we must think that Rhea is either born of Sky or, more likely, reborn of Zeus himself. In spite of everything, the goddess keeps her identity and, even reborn, she keeps the role of mother.

In the same way that Zeus, by swallowing Sky's penis, became the father of the first god and thus was able to restart the structure of the cosmos, so by committing incest with his mother, he becomes his own son and succeeds himself as a last resort to stabilize power. Zeus, by uniting with his mother, breaks the cycle of succession. His ancestors had lost power at the hands of their respective descendants.⁷⁰ By becoming his own son, Zeus succeeds himself and avoids the conflicts for power that had been characteristic of the "first creation." So he also definitively neutralizes the distinction between the two phases of world creation.⁷¹

II.13. An *Ex Abrupto* Ending

The papyrus ends with a blank sheet. The last verse left us with Zeus' intention to commit incest. It is possible that the poem stopped here and left other topics only hinted at, some of them as fundamental to Orphic religion as the birth of Dionysos. Equally absent from the poem is the combination of the theme of the world's organization with that of fate and salvation, a topic characteristic of later Orphic works.

It is possible, too, that the poem continued and dealt with one or more of these topics, but that the commentator was not interested in them. However, there is an argument that makes me prefer the idea

⁶⁹ Cf. col. XXII 7-10 Γῆ δὲ καὶ Μήτηρ καὶ Ῥέα καὶ Ἥρα ἡ αὐτή. . . Δημήτηρ [δὲ] ὠνομάσθη ὥσπερ ἡ Γῆ Μήτηρ "Earth, Mother, Rhea, and Hera are the same . . . she was called Demeter like Ge Meter."

⁷⁰ On the relationship between the fight for divine power and the attempts to altering the normal course of generations, cf. Bernabé 1989.

⁷¹ Calame 1997:74.

that the poet would not continue the poem or, at least, he would not explicitly narrate Zeus' incest. The commentator puts a lot of effort into eliminating Zeus' incest by means of the reinterpretation of ἑᾶς:

ὁ δὲ λέγει] 'μη[τρ]ὸς' μὲν ὅτι μήτηρ ὁ Νοῦς ἐστὶν τῶν ἄλλων.
'ἑᾶς' δὲ ὅτι ἀγαθῆς, δηλοῖ δὲ καὶ ἐν τοῖσδε τοῖς ἔπεσιν ὅτι
'ἀγαθὴν' σημαίνει·

“Ἐρμῆ, Μαιάδος υἱέ, διάκτορε, δῶτορ ἑᾶων”

δηλοῖ δὲ καὶ ἐν τ[ῶ]ιδε⁷²

δοιοὶ γάρ τε πίθοι κατακείαται ἐν Διὸς οὔδει
δώρων οἷα διδοῦσι κακῶν, ἕτερος δέ τ' ἑᾶων

οἱ δὲ τὸ {ρ}ῥήμα οὐ γινώσκοντες δοκοῦσιν εἶναι μητρὸς
ἑαυτοῦ· ὁ δ' εἶπερ ἤθελεν ἑαυτοῦ 'μητρὸς ἐμ φιλότητι'
ἀποδειξάι θέλοντα μιχθῆναι τὸν θεόν, ἐξῆν αὐτῶι γράμματα
παρακλίναντι 'μητρὸς ἑοῖο' εἶπε[ῖ]ν.

Col. XXVI 1–12

(Orpheus says) “mother” because Mind is the “mother” of the other (elements) and [h]eas because she is “good.” He reveals that it ([h]eas) signifies “good” in the following words too:

‘Hermes, Maia’s son, guide and giver of goods’ [eaon].

It is clear [or “(Orpheus) reveals it”] in the following [passage] too:

For double jars are placed on Zeus’ floor
of gifts of evil, but the other full of goods [eaon].

Those who do not understand the phrase [metros [h]eas] suppose that it means “his own mother.” But had (Orpheus) wanted to present the god as “wanting to unite with his own mother in love” he could have said “his own [heoio] mother,” by changing some letters.

⁷² It is uncertain whether the texts quoted are *Od.* 8.335 and *Il.* 24.527–528 or two fragments by “Orpheus”; cf. *OF* 687–688 where the question is discussed.

His effort would be perfectly useless if the incest was explicitly narrated in the continuation of the text. Only if the reference to the incest was limited to this allusion in the poem, it is possible for the commentator to minimize it by means of his slanted exegesis.

What is clear is that the structure, the religious ambience, and the philosophical ideology of the poem are centered around Zeus. If Dionysos had any role in the work, it had to be very secondary.

III. BY WAY OF CONCLUSION: MANY QUESTIONS AND SOME ANSWERS

At this point it is convenient to sum up and to go into some concrete aspects in greater depth.

III.1. Addressees and Function of the Poem

We have seen that the addressees must be the followers of a particular form of Greek religion whom we call Orphics. Our poem, therefore, is part of what we call the Orphic *traditio*, the wisdom communicated to the initiates as a part of what they must know about the world, the gods, and themselves.

We do not know the concrete function of the poem. It is not an initiation poem, but it presupposes information contained in other ones. It can be a *ἱερὸς λόγος* related as *λεγόμενα* to a ritual, but it is impossible to determine which ritual it would be and whether it had something to do with the ones alluded to by the commentator himself. Anyway, it does not seem to talk about Dionysos, or about the origin of men, the evolution of the human soul, or eschatology. It is *sensu stricto* a cosmogony. It can be defined as an reminder of the cosmogonic foundation of the Orphic beliefs. The commentator also understands it so and, therefore, his commentary is aimed at clarifying how Orpheus “really” explained the order of the world.

The central purpose of the poem seems to be the glorification of Zeus, who is presented not only as an absolute king and successor of himself, but also as the center of the history of the universe, after having assumed in himself the first creation and having become the

demiurge of the second and definitive world creation, which follows rational principles.

It is to this central purpose that the rest of the elements in the story are subordinated. As for the previous story, it does not seem to tell anything about how the first gods are born, nor to give details about how the fight for power arose among them, even the presence of the female partners of the different gods is presupposed but it is never alluded to. As regards the subsequent episodes of the story, which deal with the ordered creation of the world and the incest with the mother, they are only alluded to. The eventual continuation of the world's creation, Dionysos' birth, or the origin of men have no place in our story either.

III.2. Zeus, Center of the Poem and of the World

The most interesting thing is that the Derveni theogony presents Zeus as the center of both the poem and the world. Let us sum up the ways in which these ideas are expressed:

a) Already in the "plan" of the work (OF 4) the aim is to tell the story of the gods born of Zeus, not of Sky and Earth, as in Hesiod.

b) The story begins precisely when Zeus seizes power and the strength of his father (OF 5).

c) Zeus visits Night (the first ancestor, OF 6), receives the predictions of his father (OF 7), and swallows the penis of his grandfather (OF 8). So he gathers from his ancestors information, strength, and the capacity to generate, in addition to the *μητις* and the *τιμή* of the gods.

d) He is the king of everything in the present and in the future (OF 13) and in some way, in the past too, since he returns to the *ἀρχή*. His power, by making a loop in time, becomes atemporal.

e) The fundamental position in the poem is occupied by the brief hymn that summarises his characteristics. Several rhetorical devices (e.g. flashback) highlight this "centrality" of the hymn itself.

f) Zeus converts many again into one and he generates many again. Thus, he is a kind of harmonization of contradictions (a characteristic that reminds of Heraclitus' formulations of the divine). So he is the first and the last, head and center.

g) In later versions of the hymn he is said to be both male and a young woman (νύμφη).⁷³ We do not know whether this verse was already in this version of the hymn. But, in any case, Zeus is considered so because the god, although male, becomes pregnant with the universe and behaves like a mother.

h) He also repeatedly breaks the hereditary line. He becomes his own ancestor and the lover of his mother. He interrupts, on the one hand, the continuity of the world's evolution by returning to the origin, and, on the other, the genealogical continuity by succeeding himself.

i) His identification with the πνεῦμα of the universe shows that he still is a revitalising principle after the creation process.

j) The Hesiodic narration is theological-genealogical and deals with power. The topics of how the gods are born, the relationships among them, and their fight for power are very balanced in the text. In the Derveni theogony, however, the problem of power is separated from the theological one. In the first part of the poem, the problem of power displaces all the others and, in the second part, the only theme is that of the world's creation, which starts after Zeus has seized and consolidated his power.

III.3. The Derveni Theogony within the Frame of Orphic Poems

Our poem had to be very short,⁷⁴ judging by its characteristic narrative speed. The poet dedicates only a verse or two to the fundamental events and he does not intend to narrate all events systematically, like Hesiod in the *Theogony*. This means that he often resorts to intertextuality; that is, he presupposes that the hearer knows other texts in which the story was thoroughly narrated.⁷⁵ West⁷⁶ believes that it is an abbreviated version of the *Protogonus' Theogony*. It seems more likely, however, to think that it was a brief poem that took for granted the knowledge of other poems. We could mention among the works that are more similar

⁷³ OF 31.4 Ζεὺς ἄρσῃν γένετο, Ζεὺς ἄμβροτος ἔπλετο νύμφη.

⁷⁴ About 80 verses, according Tsantsanoglou 1997:118n46.

⁷⁵ Not necessarily Orphic texts; the Hesiodic *Theogony* itself can be one of them.

⁷⁶ West 1983:87, 95n44.

to this one the old *Homeric Hymns*, on the one hand and, on the other, the so-called *Orpheus' Testament*, really a late *ἱερὸς λόγος* written by hellenized Jews.⁷⁷ In fact, the commentator calls it a "hymn,"⁷⁸ whereas Janko⁷⁹ prefers to consider it a *ἱερὸς λόγος*.

Despite its short length, it points out *in nuce* some elements that will be further developed in later poems:

a) Night is the first being and the beginning of everything.

b) The order Sky-Kronos-Zeus is the nucleus of the divine genealogy that leads to the present order of things.

c) Against the linearity of the Hesiodic creation, in this poem, the process returns to the origin, since Zeus swallows Sky's penis and becomes pregnant to recreate the world. Maybe the poet intends to create thereby a kind of cyclical model of the alternation of times⁸⁰ placing himself in a problem preferred by cosmogonic poets and presocratic philosophers: the alternative between one and many. This cyclical model could be also consistent with the Orphic message according to which the souls have to go through certain cyclical periods in order to achieve their definitive salvation; however, this is merely a possibility. Both ideas (the cyclical model of time related to the problem of one vs. many,⁸¹ and the interest in the salvation of the souls) coexist in the work of Empedocles, an author who had a strong influence on Orphic models.

d) Zeus is the demiurge of the universe, conceived as a well-done and finished work of art.

e) Zeus is considered the center of everything, beginning and end, male and female, breath and fate of all beings.

f) Zeus commits incest with his mother.

The schema becomes more complicated in later theogonies, in which more episodes are added until they reach the greatest length in

⁷⁷ Cf. Riedweg 1993.

⁷⁸ According to Tsantsanoglou's reconstruction of the col. VII 2 ὕμνον [ὕγ]ιή και θεμ[ι]τὰ λέγο[ντα] (cf. Tsantsanoglou 1997:95). Most 1997:125 calls it an "Orphic hymn." On the difficulties of this proposal, cf. Betegh 2004:135-138.

⁷⁹ Janko 1986:158.

⁸⁰ Cf. Bernabé 1990.

⁸¹ Cf. Bernabé 1998b. Identifying Zeus with Mind, the commentator tries to combine the religious Orphic doctrines with philosophical ones (as Anaxagoras' for instance).

the *Rhapsodies*, a poem with a systematic plan and whose length can be compared with that of the *Iliad*.

There was, however, an old Orphic theogony, an alternative to the one appearing in the Derveni Papyrus, in which the central episode was the creation of a cosmic egg inhabited by Eros, which will be the origin of the world. Such a cosmogony is alluded to by Aristophanes and probably by Euripides.⁸² Already in the theogony by Hieronymus and Hellanicus and later in the *Rhapsodies* there is a coalescence of the theogony of Night and the one of the egg. The situation is summarized in the table on the following page.⁸³

Eudemus' theogony tries to conciliate the Orphic theogony with the Homeric one, which considers Okeanos and Thetis as parents of the generation.⁸⁴ This solution will not have continuity, and the alternative proposal by Hieronymus and Hellanicus, in which the primeval element was water, will not have it either.

In the *Rhapsodies* the different previous cosmogonic traditions are included. Following the model by Hieronymus and Hellanicus, the Firstborn is identified with the Eros born of the egg. This character is also identified with Metis, in order to approximate the swallowing of Phanes with the one of Metis in Hesiod and so explain in a different way Zeus' epithet μητίετα. While in the Derveni theogony Zeus swallows the penis of the firstborn Sky, in Hieronymus and Hellanicus' version, followed by the *Rhapsodies*, he swallows the Firstborn himself. The effects are the same: the cosmic pregnancy and the recreation of the world.

III.4. The Role of the Commentator

On the other hand, the exegesis of their own texts is characteristic of the Orphics.⁸⁵ Our commentator is a good example of it. In his own way he tries to make progress within the perimeters set by the poet himself.

⁸² Ar. Av. 690–702, E. *Hypsip.* fr. 758a.1103–1108 Kannicht, who mentions the first-born and Night.

⁸³ Cf. Bernabé 2003.

⁸⁴ *Il.* 14.201.

⁸⁵ Cf. Pl. *Men.* 81a, quoted in II.1 above.

COSMOGONIES OF THE NIGHT		COSMOGONIES OF THE EGG		
Derveni	Eudemus ⁸⁶	Aristophanes ⁸⁷	Hieronymus-Hellanicus	Rhapsodies
Night	Night	Chaos-Night	Water Time	(Primeval Night) Time
Sky	Sky/Earth	Egg Eros	Egg ⁸⁸ Phanes	Egg Phanes
Kronos	Kronos		Sky/Earth	Sky/Earth
Zeus	Zeus		Kronos	Kronos/Rhea
Dionysos?	Dionysos?		Zeus	Zeus
			Dionysos	Dionysos

⁸⁶ In E. *Melan. Sup.* fr. 484 Kannicht, instead of Night μορφῆ μίτρα appears (which splits into Sky and Earth, cf. OF 66). A. R. 1.497 (cf. OF 67) mentions also μίτρα . . . μορφῆ and adds (504) Ophion and Eurynome (cf. Pherecyd. fr. 73, 78–79 Schibli) to the genealogy.

⁸⁷ And maybe E. *Hypsip.* fr. 758a.1103–1108 Kannicht.

⁸⁸ Sky and Earth are the shell of the cosmic Egg.

If the poet already intended to explain reality, the commentator tries to explain how the poet explains reality, although he does it from completely different assumptions more typical of his time. The process will be repeated some centuries later, with the Neoplatonists, who will carry out again a similar operation with Orphic texts (in this case, the *Rhapsodies*): maintaining the message of the παλαιὸς ἱερός λόγος, which is true because it is old and has been inspired by the gods, but “translating” it into the ways of expressing reality that are typical of their time.

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