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COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

THE BEGINNING OF TIME:  
VEDIC AND ORPHIC THEOGONIES AND POETICS

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A Thesis submitted to the  
Department of Classics  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Degree Awarded:  
Spring Semester, 2008

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A. - Aeschylus	Olympiod. – Olympiodorus
AB – <i>Aitareya Brāhmaṇa</i>	<i>Phaedon. - Phaedonem</i>
Ag. – <i>Agamemnon</i>	Plat. – Plato
An. - <i>Anabasis</i>	<i>Praep. ev. – Praeparatio evangelica</i>
Ar. - Aristophanes	Procl. – Proclus
Aristot. - Aristotle	<i>Pro Christian. – Legatio sive Supplicatio</i>
Athenag. – Athenagoras	<i>pro Christianis</i>
AV – <i>Atharva Veda</i>	<i>Rempubl. – Rem publicam</i>
B. – Albertus Bernabé	RV – <i>Rig Veda</i>
Damasc. – Damascius	ŚB – <i>Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i>
<i>De Princ. – De Principiis</i>	<i>Tim. – Timaeus</i>
K. – Otto Kern	<i>Th. – Thesmophoriazusae</i>
<i>Metaphys. – Metaphysics</i>	X. - Xenophon

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationship between Vedic and Orphic theogonies, both from a mythological and poetic perspective. In both the *Rig Veda* and in the various Orphic fragments, a primordial god is born from a cosmic egg, which when broken becomes the source of heaven and earth. Both the Vedic Prajāpati and the Orphic Protogonos self-procreate in order to create other gods, humans, and animals. They are also both connected to sacrifice through ritual dismemberment, Prajāpati with the annual disassembling of the sacrificial altar, and Protogonos through his heir, Dionysus. The consistent theme in each mythology is creation through fragmentation from an original source. Therefore, the goal of the religious practitioner is to identify with the primordial god and so share his original creative power. This religious purpose is reflected in the poetic tradition of each culture. The poet uses meter, themes and formulae in order to invoke the god's completeness and the dualistic nature of the universe. This comparison contributes to a larger picture of interaction between Greece and India in the development of their poetic and religious traditions.

## INTRODUCTION

Martin West makes the observation, in *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient* and later in his *Orphic Poems*, that the Orphic figure of Protogonos (or Phanes) shares a number of remarkable similarities with another god, the Vedic Prajāpati.<sup>1</sup> His comparison is made in a few pages, at the most, before he moves on. However, such a hypothesis is no small matter, and it deserves further investigation and development. The purpose of this thesis is to lay out a complete comparison of these two gods: their role in myth and religion along with their depiction in their respective poetic-religious traditions. Chapter 1 will examine Prajāpati in his mythical, religious, and poetic context; chapter 2 will do the same for Protogonos; in chapter 3 we will compare the two deities and analyze the results; and finally in the conclusion we will attempt to explain how these similarities arose, examining the historical contexts from which the Vedic and Orphic tradition developed. The essential question is to what extent common motifs developed indigenously or were either imported or borrowed.

Within Vedic mythology, Prajāpati is the Vedic “Lord of the Creatures,” born from a cosmic egg at the dawn of creation. He is the source of creation through self-procreation and through his association with the cosmic man, Puruṣa. In the context of Vedic ritual, he is seen as a dismembered god who is recreated in the form of the sacrificial altar. Therefore, worshippers could participate in his rebirth through an annual sacrificial ritual. But, as we shall see, his role as a creator god and a source of cosmic order were also highlighted by certain poetic features used by the poet. Likewise, Protogonos in the Orphic theogony is the “first-born” god of the Orphic pantheon. He too was born from a cosmic egg and was a source of all future creation. His role is continued and sustained in his heirs, Zeus and Dionysus. The dying and rising figure in the Orphic context is the child Dionysus, who is dismembered and eaten by the Titans and later recreated by Zeus. Worshippers reenacted this story in the ritual initiation to the cult of Dionysus, sharing in the death and rebirth of the god and thereby gaining good passage into the underworld. Moreover, in the context of poetics, word choice and placement both

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<sup>1</sup> West 1971, 28-34 and West 1983, 104.

closely tie Protagonos to Zeus and Dionysus and highlight his all-encompassing power as the creator of all.

### **History of Scholarship**

The comparative study of Greek and Vedic philology, along with religion and philosophy, began during the 18<sup>th</sup> century when scholars began to study Sanskrit as a result of western colonization in India. In 1786, Sir William Jones definitively claimed that “no philologer could examine them all three [Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit] without believing them to have sprung from some common source.”<sup>2</sup> The question for western scholarship then became one of origin. Because of the implications for western imperialism, the search for the “homeland of the Indo-Europeans” began as a politically and racially charged field. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, imperialists attempted to argue that the Aryans described in the *Rig Veda* were actually a white race that had invaded India from Europe.<sup>3</sup>

As the political relationship between India and the West changed, the racist agenda of comparative scholarship decreased during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Improvements in archaeological and philological methodology also allowed for more objectivity in the study of the Indo-Europeans and India’s relationship to ancient Greece. The linguistic theory, as presented by Calvert Watkins, holds that if two languages show common forms that cannot be explained by direct interaction, then each must have derived those forms from a parent language, now called “Proto-Indo-European.”<sup>4</sup> Many scholars have spent their careers recreating a hypothetical proto-language and in addition a proto-culture from which to explain seemingly impossible parallels among Celtic, Germanic, Italic, Greek, Slavic, Persian, and Sanskrit (to name the major Indo-European branches).<sup>5</sup>

The traditional, though now highly criticized, view of the Proto-Indo-Europeans is that of a chariot-riding, warring people who expanded over India and Europe and replaced the indigenous cultures with their own characteristic Indo-European culture.

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<sup>2</sup> Cannon 1964, 141.

<sup>3</sup> For examples of racial arguments, see Chakrabarti 1997, 74-151.

<sup>4</sup> Watkins 1995, 5.

<sup>5</sup> For a thorough introduction to Proto-Indo-European language and culture, see Mallory and Adams 2006.

Therefore, similarities in language, religion, and culture are explained as coming from a common invading people. A number of theories for the geographic origin of the Indo-Europeans have been argued, and the debate still continues. The most recent suggestions have been Anatolia,<sup>6</sup> the Caucasus Region,<sup>7</sup> Bactria-Sogdia,<sup>8</sup> and the Kurgan culture of the Central Asian steppe.<sup>9</sup> Another debate is still continuing over the relationship between this Proto-Indo-European culture and the ancient Greeks and Indians. It is clear from the archaeological and linguistic evidence that there was a dramatic change in India before the Vedic period (1500 B.C.-500 B.C.)<sup>10</sup> and in Greece during the Bronze Age. At one extreme, scholars have argued that at this time the Proto-Indo-Europeans—a warring, chariot riding race—invaded and imposed their language, culture, and religion on the indigenous population.<sup>11</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, scholars have argued for continuity between the pre-historic and new literate culture, arguing that the change could have taken place through syncretism.<sup>12</sup>

Beyond the field of Indo-European studies, even in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, a Hellenocentric bias still prevailed among western scholars. The study of Orphism seems to have been especially vulnerable because of the foreign birth of Orpheus himself (who according to myth was a native of Thrace). E. R. Dodds, for example, argues that Orpheus and Orphism were examples of “the irrational” in Greek religion, and because of what he saw as distinctly “shamanic” elements, he argued that Orphism most likely came from Thrace.<sup>13</sup> W. C. K. Guthrie made a similar argument about Orphic cosmogony and its Oriental origin. He described the Orphic Phanes of the Rhapsodies as a “survival...in his barbaric form.”<sup>14</sup>

The introduction of “Orientalism” by Edward Said in 1979 changed the perspective of comparative studies.<sup>15</sup> By arguing that the “West” used the “East” as a

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<sup>6</sup> Renfrew 1990.

<sup>7</sup> Gamkrelidze and Ivanov 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Nichols 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Gimbutas 1977.

<sup>10</sup> See Bryant 2001 for an overview of scholarship on the relationship between the Indo-Europeans and Vedic culture.

<sup>11</sup> See Fairservis 1971 for Vedic and Drews 1988 for Greek material.

<sup>12</sup> Renfrew 1990.

<sup>13</sup> Dodds 1951, 146-7.

<sup>14</sup> Guthrie 1952, 90.

<sup>15</sup> Said 1979.

projection of the “other” against which to define itself, Said provided a more insightful method not only for modern relations but also for understanding the ancient relationship between Greece and India. From this perspective, we can explain “foreign” elements in Greek culture not only as being borrowed from neighboring cultures, but also as native Greek constructions based on their concept of “the other.” For example, it could be argued that Orpheus came from Thrace, and therefore his teachings have Thracian elements; conversely, if Orpheus is a Greek construction, then the “Thracian” elements are based on the Greek understanding of Thracian religion. Such a perspective challenges the basis for Dodds’ argument for the Thracian origin of Orphism and further opens the door for different interpretations of common themes found in Greek and Indian mythology.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a group of scholars emerged who would pursue the comparative method while developing and employing more critical methodology. Martin West and Walter Burkert have both contributed to the study of Greek religion and literature in its relation to the Near East and India.<sup>16</sup> Wendy Doniger has made a number of comparisons between Greek and Indian mythology, especially in reference to gender and sexuality.<sup>17</sup> In the field of comparative poetics, there have been a number of case studies, such as Gregory Nagy’s analysis of the Greek and Indic formula for “imperishable fame,”<sup>18</sup> and Calvert Watkins’ study of Indo-European dragon-slaying motifs.<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere, Watkins has demonstrated more specifically that the hymns of the *Rig Veda* share striking similarities in poetics to the poems of the Greek lyric poet Pindar.<sup>20</sup>

For the present study on Vedic and Orphic theogonies, I will be following the general method of Watkins in examining a specific example and applying the results to the broader field of comparative mythology. An appealing aspect of these case studies is that the amount of detail given in such a specific comparison allows for more reliable results than with sweeping generalizations, and the outcome is still applicable to the broader context of comparative religion, philology, and poetics. As we will see in our

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<sup>16</sup> For examples of their comparative work, see West 1971, West 1997, Burkert 1992, Burkert 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Doniger 1998, Doniger 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Nagy 1974.

<sup>19</sup> Watkins 1995.

<sup>20</sup> Watkins 2002.

comparison of the Vedic and Orphic theogonies, similarities arise on multiple levels: there are similarities surrounding the description of the god, his function in creation, his function in ritual, and the poetic features used by the poet in order to highlight these aspects of the god. Our hope is that this comparison will provide insight into the development of Vedic and Orphic religion and poetics.

## CHAPTER 1

### PRAJĀPATI IN VEDIC TEXTS

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, we will examine Vedic texts dealing with the god Prajāpati. This first-born god resembles his Orphic counterpart, Protogonos, in his role as a creator-god and in his shared themes of death, dismemberment and rebirth. For each god, these motifs are significant to the religious experience of the worshipper, who shares in the god's power over life and death through ritual. However, the Vedic and Orphic texts not only share mythological themes, but they are also similar in their poetic nature. Therefore, a poetic analysis will follow the mythological examination, in order to establish a basis for comparison. Overall, we must examine the role of the god in several different contexts: in mythology, in ritual, in the text, and from the perspective of both the poet and his audience, both human and divine.

The Vedic hymns represent the oldest surviving texts from India, the earliest being the *Rig Veda*. Although the hymns were not put down in writing until relatively late (around the third century B.C.), they were part of a long oral tradition dating back to the middle of the second millennium B.C.<sup>21</sup> The vocabulary and themes within the *Rig Veda* reflect the culture of the early Aryans who appeared in the Punjab at the start of the Vedic period (1500-500 B.C.).<sup>22</sup> The previous period of Indian history was the Indus Valley Civilizations of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro (3300-1700 B.C.), which featured urban cities and a writing system, which has yet to be deciphered. The most significant change for our purposes is the development of a new language and along with it, a new genre of literature, which is featured in such works as the *Rig Veda* and *Atharva-Veda*. The traditional Hindu gods, such as Vishnu and Agni, also develop at this time, contributing to the argument that both the language and culture came from an outside, Indo-European

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<sup>21</sup> Renfrew 1990, 178.

<sup>22</sup> Watkins 1995, 55. While the hymns contain many Indo-European motifs, it is uncertain to what extent the war-like nature of some hymns is to be taken literally or applied to historical events. See Renfrew 1990, 188-189.

source. Colin Renfrew, however, argues that there is continuity between the Indus Valley Civilization and Vedic culture, the change coming as a result of the decline of the urban culture of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, while the Vedic culture developed out of the rural population.<sup>23</sup> The answer to these questions would determine whether the mythology and language of the *Rig Veda* were indigenous to India or brought in by an invading or migrating people. This distinction will become more crucial in the comparison between the Vedic and Orphic texts.

The word *veda* itself means “knowledge” and is directly related to the linguistic root meaning, “to see.” Therefore, the *Vedas* were a source of sacred knowledge, and the practitioner who understood the Vedas participated in the divine. According to Mahony, such a perception “allowed a visionary to see through a process of direct perception, ecstatic experience, or inner vision what were regarded as fully sacred modes and structures of being, even ultimate reality itself.”<sup>24</sup> The texts were thought to be divinely inspired, and to reveal hidden truths about the gods and the cosmos.

When the ritual aspect of the text is combined with the oral nature of the tradition, it is clear that the words themselves held a very real, divine power in ancient India. The recitation of the hymns was in itself part of the ritual. As Gregory Nagy states, “we are dealing with an art-form grounded in religion. The ostensible audience is divine, not human, so that even human comprehension is not a prime consideration.”<sup>25</sup> The hymns were used not only to praise the gods but, in conjunction with the ritual actions, to appease them and thereby to affect the human world. In order to have the maximum effect, the poet used every literary device available to him, including meter, formulae, and phonetic figures such as alliteration, rhyming, echoes, and so forth. Each served the purpose of bringing attention, both human and divine, to central themes or entreaties.

One of the many gods praised in the Vedas is Prajāpati, “Lord of the Creatures.” This relatively obscure god served a creative role in many texts and is often associated with or confused with other gods, such as Agni, Vishnu, Kāla, and the so-called “Unknown God” or “Ka” (meaning “who”), who is associated with Hiranyagarbha, the

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<sup>23</sup> Renfrew 1990, 190. B. B. Lal argues further that the Indus Valley Civilizations themselves were the root of Indo-European culture, based on archaeological evidence compared to floral and faunal references in the RV (Lal 2005, 69-84).

<sup>24</sup> Mahony 1998, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Nagy 1974, 16-17.

“Golden Embryo.” The title *prajāpati* was originally used as an epithet for other gods, but as Vedic philosophy developed, the epithet became personified in the form of the god, Prajāpati.<sup>26</sup> The relevant hymns for the study of Prajāpati are *Rig Veda* 10.121, a hymn honoring the golden embryo that held the first-born god, and *Rig Veda* 10.129, otherwise known as the creation hymn because of its speculation about the origin of the cosmos. Both hymns either directly or indirectly describe the nature and creations of Prajāpati, bringing out the god’s role as the first god and the creator of the cosmos. In the context of *Rig Veda* 10.90 and later Vedic texts, Prajāpati also becomes a dying and rising god in his association with Puruṣa, the cosmic man whose dismembered body provides the various parts of the cosmos and the social order of the caste system.<sup>27</sup>

## The Mythology of Prajāpati

### The Golden Embryo

According to Mircea Eliade, Vedic literature contains four types of creation narrative: creation from primordial waters, creation from the dismemberment of a primordial god, creation from unity, and creation from separating the realms of heaven and earth.<sup>28</sup> Each of these themes are attested in the myths directly or indirectly concerning Prajāpati, as in *Rig Veda* 10.121, the *Hiraṇyagarbha-Sūkta*.<sup>29</sup> The hymn is phrased as a riddle, asking the question *ka*, or “who?” in the last foot of each line, “who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?” (*kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema*). The last line of the hymn answers the question, “O Prajāpati, lord of progeny, no one but you embraces all these creatures” (*prajāpate na tvad etāny anyo viśvā jātāni pari tā babhūva*). According to this hymn, the *hiraṇyagarbha* (usually translated “the Golden Embryo”) was born from the waters and contained everything (*āpo he yad brhatīr viśvam āyan garbhan*).<sup>30</sup> This last word, *garbha*, is itself a rich word with a wide range of

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<sup>26</sup> Vyas 1978, 95.

<sup>27</sup> Translations of the hymns are from Doniger 1981.

<sup>28</sup> Eliade 1978, 223.

<sup>29</sup> The complete text of RV 10.121 and 10.129 can be found in the appendix.

<sup>30</sup> RV 10.121.7a

meanings: womb, interior, embryo, or child.<sup>31</sup> The image of the golden embryo embodies both the male and female aspect of procreation:

The egg is both a female image (that which is fertilized by seed and which contains the embryo that is like the yolk) and a male image (the testicles containing seed). Thus the range of meanings may be seen as a continuum of androgynous birth images: seed (male egg), womb (female egg), embryo, child.<sup>32</sup>

The embryo in the beginning is characterized by unification, the combination of dualities. Without a mother and father figure, the embryo represents both, arising on its own. It is both literally and figuratively the seed of all creation. The egg contains all the creative potential that will be manifested in the figure of Prajāpati.

The undifferentiated nature of the beginning of time and the cosmos is echoed in another hymn, *Rig Veda* 10.129, *Nāsadiya*, or “Creation Hymn.” The use of the pronoun *ka*, “who,” and the emphasis on “the One” (*tat ekaḥ*) ties this hymn together with RV 10.121, even though Prajāpati is not mentioned, and the question “who?” is not answered.<sup>33</sup> The first two lines of the hymn begin by describing the lack of duality: “there was neither non-existence nor existence then” (*nāsad āsīn no sad āsīt tadānīm*), and “there was neither death nor immortality” (*na mṛtyur āsīd amṛtan na tarhi*). Creation is placed at the last foot of line 3, “that one arose through the power of heat” (*tapasas tan mahinājāyataikam*)

As the golden embryo is born, so too duality is created in the cosmos. Among the various actions attributed to *Ka*, or Prajāpati, he is said to support the sky and measure out the middle space:

*yena dyaur ugrā pṛthivī ca dṛlhā*  
*yena svaḥ stabhitam yena nākaḥ*  
*yo antarikṣe rajaso vimānaḥ*

He by whom the awesome sky and earth were made firm,  
by whom the dome of the sky was propped up, and the sun,  
who measured out the middle realm of space (RV 10.121.5a-c).

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<sup>31</sup> Monier-Williams 1964.

<sup>32</sup> Doniger 1981, 27.

<sup>33</sup> The god is referred to as “the One” in 10.129.2a, 10.129.3b and in 10.121.1b, 10.121.7a and 10.121.8a.

According to Stella Kramrisch, it is this middle space (*antari-kṣa*) that allows for structure in the cosmos: “The created world has for its sign the three: Heaven and Earth (*dyāvā-prthivī*) and the mid-space (*antarikṣa*) are the ternary by which the structure of the outer and inner world of man is ruled.”<sup>34</sup> She says that the mid-space “establishes the middle between the contraries which makes possible the movement of thought and the seeing of images, both ascent and descent, between the two poles.”<sup>35</sup> The absence of being and non-being mentioned in the beginning of RV 10.129 is not distinguishable. Once this separation is made, the “One” can now perceive duality, which is the first step in the creative process.

*Rig Veda* 10.121, the hymn praising the Golden Embryo, was itself used in Vedic ritual. As pointed out by Jan Gonda, the entire hymn was “enjoined upon those who perform the *anavalobhana* ritual, which is to prevent any disturbance of the embryo and in the name-giving ritual which was an act of creation.”<sup>36</sup> Gonda argues that Prajāpati’s “creative and preservative power” was called upon in such rituals during the transitional periods of conception and childbirth.<sup>37</sup> Through the praise of the original birth of Prajāpati, each birth became a ritual reenactment of the hymn, and the practitioners used the power of the spoken words to influence the god and insure a safe birth.

### The Lord of Creatures

Three key factors lead to Prajāpati’s first creation: the mind (*manah*), desire (*kāma*), and heat (*tapas*), each of which is illustrated in RV 10.129.3d-4b:

*tapasas tan mahinājāyataikem  
kāmas tad agre sam avartatādhi  
manaso retaḥ prathamam yad āsīt*

That one arose through the power of heat.  
Desire came upon that one in the beginning;  
that was the first seed of mind.

<sup>34</sup> Kramrisch 1962, 143.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>36</sup> Gonda 1982, 133; cf. *Āśvalāyana Grhyapariśiṣṭa* 11 and *Baudhāyana Grhyasūtra* 2.1.24

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 133.

Wendy Doniger describes this *tapas* as “the heat generated by ritual activity and by physical mortification of the body.”<sup>38</sup> According to the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, after Prajāpati conceived the desire to multiply, he practices *tapas*, and thus Agni was born from the earth, Vāyu from the atmosphere, and Āditya from the heavens. His *tapas* also created the Vedas.<sup>39</sup> Just as the embryo was born from the *tapas* of the waters, so Prajāpati creates the gods and source of Vedic knowledge itself. In addition, the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* attributes the birth of Vāc, or “word” (the equivalent of the Greek *logos*), to Prajāpati.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, this one god has created the heaven and earth, the gods, and the ability to communicate.

Mircea Eliade views the ascetic activity of Prajāpati’s efforts (through *tapas*) not only as creative, but also sexual. Both *tapas* and another word associated with Prajāpati’s creations, *visṛj*, “to emit,” he says, “can have indirect or implied sexual connotations, for asceticism and sexuality are intimately connected in Indian religious thought.”<sup>41</sup> As stated previously, the embryo from which Prajāpati was born was of an androgynous nature, and it is natural to assume from Prajāpati’s acts of self-procreation that he himself was to some extent androgynous.

### The Dying and Rising God

Not only does Prajāpati self-procreate in order to populate the cosmos, but his own body becomes part of the cosmic system through sacrifice. Other Vedic texts describe how the various body parts of the god compose the universe in the macrocosm, and the sacrificial altar in the microcosm.<sup>42</sup> This is reminiscent of the Vedic Puruṣa, or the “Cosmic Man,” worshipped in *Rig Veda* 10.90, the *Puruṣa-Sūkta*. The opening of that hymn describes this primordial man:

*saharaśīrṣa puruṣaḥ  
sahasrākṣaḥ sahasrapāt  
sa būmim viśvato vṛtvā  
aty atiṣṭhad daśāṅgulam*

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<sup>38</sup> Doniger 1981, 26 n. 3.

<sup>39</sup> AB 5.32.

<sup>40</sup> ŚB 6.1.1.9.

<sup>41</sup> Eliade 1978, 228.

<sup>42</sup> ŚB 1.6.3.35-36, 11.1.6.1.2.

The Man has a thousand heads,  
a thousand eyes, a thousand feet.  
He pervaded the earth on all sides and  
extended beyond it as far as ten fingers (RV 10.90.1)

Prajāpati is described in the same way in *Rig Veda* 10.121 as he “who has the quarters of the sky as his two arms.” (*yastemāḥ pradiśo yasya bāhū*).<sup>43</sup> This line can be interpreted as being a direct reference to Puruṣa, and this is the understanding in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, in which the “vital airs” composed Puruṣa, who is said to become Prajāpati and also Agni.<sup>44</sup> The dismemberment of the primordial god continues the process of disintegration that began with the birth of the Hiraṇyagarbha.<sup>45</sup>

The *Rig Veda* hymn indicates that the dismemberment of Puruṣa is sacrificial,<sup>46</sup> but in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, Prajāpati is restored in the creation of the sacrificial altar of Agni. ŚB 10.4.2 describes the dismembered Prajāpati in terms of the annual calendar, each piece being a brick. Therefore, when the priests reassemble the altar, according to Mircea Eliade, the sacrifice performed “repeats the primordial act of creation and guarantees the continuity of the world for the following year.”<sup>47</sup> This act of reunification also affects the individual, and the sacrificer is said to undergo an initiation rite, sharing in the dismemberment and rebirth of Prajāpati when he builds the altar.<sup>48</sup> As Brian Smith says, “Each sacrifice expresses and regenerates the sacrificer’s *ātman*, and the sacrificial life of the individual is like a canvas on which is painted the picture of the self.”<sup>49</sup> On the metaphorical level, the sacrifice represents a reunification, a return to the source. On the level of individual religious practice, however, the sacrifice is a ritual death and rebirth, which the practitioner accomplishes by reenacting the dismemberment and reassembling of the god. William Mahony describes the ritual as a “dramatic form” of the “struggle between the forces of life and being against the powers of death and nonbeing.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> RV 10.121.4c.

<sup>44</sup> Doniger 1981, 29 n. 7, cf. ŚB 6.1.1.2-6.

<sup>45</sup> The concept of a cosmic man, macranthropy, is pervasive in ancient mythology. Thomas McEvilley lists comparanda from Egypt with Amon-Re, from Mesopotamia with Marduk, and Zeus from Greece (McEvilley 2002, 24-27). Wendy Doniger argues that the dismemberment of the cosmic man is specifically an Indo-European feature, such as with the Norse figure Ymir (Doniger 1981, 31 n. 2).

<sup>46</sup> RV 10.90.6.

<sup>47</sup> Eliade 1978, 229.

<sup>48</sup> ŚB 10.4.2.29. Rebirth of the sacrificer is also expressed in ŚB 7.3.1.12 and 11.2.6.13.

<sup>49</sup> Smith 1986, 80.

<sup>50</sup> Mahony 1998, 142.

Through both the ritual and the text, the individual can participate on a microcosmic scale in the defragmentation and reintegration of the universe through his worship of the god. This not only gives him a special knowledge of the gods and the cosmos, but also enables him to overcome death.

### **Poetics of the *Rig Veda***

As we saw in the introduction, the words of the hymns themselves held power to the Vedic poets. They used a number of literary tools in order to capture the god's attention and gain the desired effect. Calvert Watkins identifies the following methods: metrics, phonetic figures, formulas, and themes.<sup>51</sup> According to Watkins:

The function of such figures of sound and grammar is indexical: they serve to point to the message, the poetic text, and call attention to it. Phonetic and grammatical figure may also have an iconic function, and serve as a verbal 'picture' of the notion...<sup>52</sup>

The poets and those participating in the ritual used the texts as a means to communicate with the divine. The poetry itself was considered to be divinely inspired.<sup>53</sup> From a more practical perspective, it should also be remembered that the Vedic literature was composed and preserved orally, and such features would be mnemonic devices.<sup>54</sup>

### **Metrics**

As Gregory Nagy observes in his comparison between Indic and Greek meter, Vedic meters are "few in number, but flexible in pattern."<sup>55</sup> The meters of both RV 10.121 and 10.129 are *triṣṭhubh*, which contains four feet of hendecasyllables. This meter tends to have an iambic opening, a caesura after the fourth or fifth foot, and limits double shorts to syllables five and six or six and seven. As Nagy argues, the meter tends to mirror syntactical boundaries: a verse line is equivalent to a sentence, and the caesura

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<sup>51</sup> Watkins 1995, 28-49.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, RV 10.129.4.

<sup>54</sup> Watkins 1995, 55.

<sup>55</sup> Nagy 1974, 4.

will fall in a logical position.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, when words or syllables fall outside their natural metrical boundary, it is usually deliberate, and the poet is drawing attention to that piece of the text. Paul Thieme called such irregularities *Sprachmalerei*, or “language painting,” and as Tatyana Elizarenkova summarizes, “These irregularities symbolize the events described in the hymn....”<sup>57</sup> RV 10.121.5b features such an irregularity. The caesura of the second foot falls in the middle of the word *stabhitam*:

*yena svaḥ sta || bhitam yena nākaḥ*  
by whom the dome of the sky was supported

The poet is calling attention to the participle, meaning “fixed, established, supported.”<sup>58</sup> As previously stated, one of the main acts of Prajāpati was the separation of heaven and earth, creating the middle space,<sup>59</sup> and the poet has highlighted this act in his use of the meter.

RV 10.129 also uses meter in order to point to central themes, but here the poet uses repetition at the caesura as opposed to irregularities. In the first two feet of verse one, *no*, “not,” is the last syllable before the caesura:

*nāsad āsīn no || sad āsīt tadānīm*  
*nāsīd rajo no || vyomā paro yat*

There was neither non-existence nor existence then;  
there was neither the realm of space nor the sky which is  
beyond (RV 10.129.1a-b).

The emphasis is on the absence of dualities. Again in the last foot of verse one and the first foot of verse two, *āsīt*, “there was,” precedes the caesura:

*ambhaḥ kim āsīt || gahanam gabhīram*  
*na mṛtyur āsīt || amṛtam na tarhi*

Was there water, bottomlessly deep?  
There was neither death nor immortality then (RV  
10.129.1c-d).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>57</sup> Elizarenkova 1995, 116; cf. Thieme 1972, 64-81.

<sup>58</sup> Monier-Williams 1964.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. page 9.

The poet is again emphasizing the present state of nothingness, with the verb “to be” repeatedly being negated. Lastly, the word *veda* precedes the caesura in the first and last foot of verse six and in the last foot of verse seven, the end of the hymn:

*ko addhā veda* || *ka iha pra vocat*  
Who really knows? Who will here proclaim it? (RV  
10.129.6a).

*nāthā ko veda* || *yata ābhabhūva*  
Who then knows whence it has arisen? (RV 10.129.6d).

*so aṅga veda* || *yadi vā na veda*  
Only he knows—or perhaps he does not know (RV  
10.129.7d).

Just as the presence of nothingness was emphasized in the preceding examples, here the uncertainty of knowledge is highlighted. Especially in the last line, even after the poet has answered his question, after the caesura he negates himself.

### Phonetic Themes

An interesting aspect of RV 10.121 and 10.129 is that the name of the god, Prajāpati, is only used once; otherwise, the god is either referred to by means of a pronoun or indirectly. Tatyana Elizarenkova argues: “The name of the lauded deity can be directly expressed in the hymn, and sometimes it appears as a distinct pattern, embroidered on the canvas, as it were, of the metrical scheme. It can also be indicated by sound-hints intertwined in the hymn’s texture.”<sup>60</sup> The purpose of such references can be to attract the attention of the god, or, as might be the case more for RV 10.129 than 10.121, to address an unknown god. Jan Gonda, in his discussion of epithets, argues that in such situations, the poet would “attempt to be sure of the right appellation—that is to say to approach the god in the right way, to enter into relation with that side of his personality which may help or assist the worshipper—by enumerating a long series of names, additional appellations and epithets.”<sup>61</sup> This comes through most in RV 10.121, in the many indirect references to Prajāpati as *patiḥ*, “lord,” or *eka*, “the One,” and the repetition of various forms of the verb *jan*, “to be born.”

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<sup>60</sup> Elizarenkova 1995, 124.

<sup>61</sup> Gonda 1959, 33-34.

According to Elizarenkova’s analysis, the most important position in the foot is the beginning, the second being the end: “The *pāda* [foot] beginning is the strongest position not only for rhythmic but also for phonetic hints at the name of the deity being praised.”<sup>62</sup> She extends this argument by observing that the name of the god, or a corresponding pronoun, can begin each stanza in certain hymns, such as RV 10.121.<sup>63</sup> Out of twenty-five feet, twenty begin with a reference to the god, two end with a reference, and there are eleven other references throughout. These include the one name, Prajāpati, two references to the embryo (*garbhaḥ*), four references to “the One” (*ekaḥ*) one personal pronoun (*sah*), twenty-one relative pronouns grouped by case (*yaḥ, yasya, yena, yam*), eight interrogative pronouns (all in the repeated foot, *kasmai devāya haviṣa vidhema*, at the end of each verse), seven forms of the verb *jan*, and two forms of *patiḥ*.<sup>64</sup>

It is obvious from examining the hymn that these thematic references also function as phonetic features. They create rhymes and repetitions in almost every line. For example, the first three feet of the second verse all have *yasya* in the same position, not only thematically, but also metrically and syntactically:

*ya ātmadā baladā **yasya** viśvā  
upāsate praśiṣam **yasya** devāḥ  
yasya chāyāmṛtaṃ **yasya** mṛtyuḥ*

who gives life, who gives strength,  
whose command all the gods, his own, obey;  
his shadow is immortality—and death (RV 10.121.2a-c).

Again, in the first three feet of verse four, *yasya* is at the beginning of each foot:

***yasyeme** himavanto mahitvā  
**yasya** samudram rasayā sahāhuḥ  
**yasyemāḥ** pradiśo yasya bāhū*

He who through his power owns these snowy mountains,  
and the ocean together with the river Rasā, they say;  
who has the quarters of the sky as his two arms (RV 10.121.4a-c).

In the second and third foot of verse nine, *yaḥ* and *jajāna* frame the foot:

***yo** vā divaṃ satyadharmā **jajāna***

<sup>62</sup> Elizarenkova 1995, 118. Note that each Vedic verse is composed of four feet, or *pādas*.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>64</sup> See Table 1 on pages 47-48 for a complete analysis of epithets and their metrical positions.

*yaś cāpaś candrā bṛhatīr jajāna*

He who fathered the earth and created the sky, whose laws are true,  
who created the high, shining waters (RV 10.121.9b-c).

This use of phonetics together with the meter all serve to draw attention to certain words, in this case to the most important words: references to the god, both his name and his function.

### Formulae

From the perspective of oral composition and preservation, the use of formulae is one of the most important tools for the poet. Calvert Watkins distinguishes two major groups of formulae in Indo-European poetry: simple designators, which are symbolic signs; and complex figures, which are connectors.<sup>65</sup> Simple formulas can further be broken down into quantifiers, whose purpose is to “designate the totality of the notion,” and qualifiers, whose purpose is to “intensify the argument.” The function of complex formulae, such as merisms, is symbolic: “they point to, or make reference to, another entity.”<sup>66</sup> Each type of formula can be found in RV 10.121 and 10.129.

Watkins’ simple quantifier formulas are the most prevalent in the two hymns, occurring six times. One way this type of formula can be formed is by the pairing of the argument with its negated argument, as in the following examples:

*na asad āsīn no sad āsīt*

There was neither **non-existence** nor **existence** (RV 10.129.1a).

*na mṛtyur āsīd amṛtan na tarhi*

There was neither **death** nor **immortality** (RV 10.129.2.a).

*yasya chāyā amṛtam yasya mṛtyuḥ*

His shadow is **immortality** and **death** (RV 10.121.2c).

The purpose of these formulas is to express the “totality of notion,” in the first two, the completeness of the nothingness. By making the hypothesis that there was neither nothing nor the opposite, the poet encompasses the depth of emptiness before the first creation distinguished being from non-being. As for the last example, the poet uses the

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<sup>65</sup> Watkins 1995, 46.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 44.

formula to express the totality of Prajāpati's nature, and perhaps to allude to the god's dismemberment and reunification.

Another form of quantifying formula is the pairing of the argument with its counter argument, as in the following cases:

*na rātryā ahna āsīt praketaḥ*  
There was no sign of **night** nor **day** (RV 10.129.2b).

*sa dādihāra pṛthivīm dyām utemām*  
He held in place the **earth** and this **sky** (RV 10.121.1c).

*yena dyaur ugrā pṛthivī ca dṛlḥā*  
He by whom the **awesome sky** and the **earth** were made firm (RV 10.121.5c).

Again, the function in this case is to illustrate totality. The argument and counter argument are even consistently next to each other in the line, further strengthening the contrast. The simple qualifier formula, on the other hand, consists of an argument paired with a synonymous argument, such as:

*nāsīd rajo no vyomā paro yat*

There was neither the realm of **space** nor the **sky** (RV 10.129.1b).

The “realm of space” and the “sky” both signify similar principles, and therefore the function of this formula is to intensify the notion. In each case listed, the poet uses the formula to draw attention, both of the worshipper and the god, to his message.

Complex formulas, on the other hand, have not only a symbolic function, but also an indexical function: “They point to, or make reference to, another entity.” One such example is in the form of a merism, defined by Watkins as “a bipartite noun phrase consisting of two nouns in a copulative relation (A and B), two nouns which share most of their semantic features, and together serve to designate globally a higher concept C,”<sup>67</sup> as follows:

*ya īse asya dvipadaś catuṣpadaḥ*

He who rules over his **two-footed** and **four-footed** creatures (RV 10.121.c).

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 45.

The “higher concept” designated here is all of creation over which Prajāpati is lord. According to Watkins, such a formula is a metonymic figure, “based on a relation of contiguity.”<sup>68</sup>

Each of these poetic figures—metrics, phonetics, themes, and formula—work together in order to create an elaborate pattern within the text. The meter of the verse often dictates the formation of the formulas and themes, and phonetic repetitions and echoes are often formed as a result of the grammar and syntax within a formula or theme. Used together, the poet can shape his text in order to bring focus to his major themes and purposes. At the same time such devices aid in oral composition and memorization.

### Conclusion

An examination of the text of the *Rig Veda* reveals a wide range of religious experience for the worshipper, from the poetics of the text itself to the truth of existence and its origins. He at once participates in the first birth in the Hiraṇyagarbha, Prajāpati’s creation of the cosmos, gods, and humans, and in the ritualistic dismemberment and reintegration of the god who forms the universe in the macrocosm and the sacrificial altar in the microcosm. As the Vedic texts were intended for ritual use, they serve as much more than pleasing poetry or instructive stories: “This speech was regarded as the supreme cosmogonic force, linked to sacrifice and mediation between gods and men.”<sup>69</sup> In the end, the worshipper who uses the text in the ritual sacrifice reenacts physically and verbally the death and rebirth of Prajāpati, and there he himself becomes a source of creation, a microcosm of the universe, and can even overcome death.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>69</sup> Elizarenkova 1995, 111.

## CHAPTER 2

### PROTOGONOS IN ORPHIC TEXTS

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, we will examine the role of Protonos in the Orphic texts. Protonos is the Orphic equivalent of Vedic Prajāpati in several ways: he is the first god born from a cosmic egg, he is the creator of the universe, and in the figure of Dionysus—a direct descendant of Protonos—worshippers participate in his death and rebirth. As in the previous chapter, we will first examine Protonos, along with his successors—Zeus and Dionysus—in Orphic mythology. Then, the chapter will offer a poetic analysis of the Orphic texts. As we will see, the poetics of these sacred texts complement the roles of the gods as creative figures.

Before we begin, however, several issues concerning Orphism need to be addressed. Simply put, Orphism is the Greek religious movement that followed the teachings of Orpheus, whose teachings concerned secrets of the afterlife and the nature of the universe. However, both the history of Orphism and the nature of the Orphic texts are far from simple. In many ways, the word “Orphism” should not be used, since there was no single, uniform Orphic “religion.” Instead there were various communities all over the Greek world that embraced Orpheus as a teacher and worshipped his gods in various ways. As Martin West argues, the one uniting factor is simply the name of Orpheus: ancient texts rarely speak of the “Orphics” or “Orphism” but instead talk about “the words of Orpheus.”<sup>70</sup>

Orpheus was the famous mythological musician who traveled to the underworld in order to rescue his wife from death. Because he was able to return to the world of mortals successfully, he was believed to have secret knowledge of the afterlife. Even after he was dismembered by Thracian women, his head was said still to sing and give prophecies. In Greece, he was embraced as a Thracian mystic bringing a

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<sup>70</sup> West 1983, 3. For more definitions of “Orphism,” see Linforth 1941, 261-89; Guthrie 1952, 6-11; and Graf and Johnston 2007, 50-51.

characteristically “oriental” (from the Greek perspective) mythology to Greece, and the popularity of his theogony rivaled that of Hesiod. A crucial question for our study of Orphism is to what extent it is a Greek or foreign religion. Many elements of Orphism are undeniably oriental in nature, but does that mean that we should agree with E. R. Dodds in saying that Orphism must have been borrowed from Thrace? On the other hand, were the seeds of Orphism present from early on in the development of Greek religion, either because of some Indo-European ancestry or from early influence from the Near East? As before with the Vedic material, the answer to this question will be crucial to understanding the relationship between the Orphic and Vedic material.

The sixth century saw an influx of theogonies with oriental motifs in Greece during the Orientalizing period.<sup>71</sup> During the fifth century, Bacchic communities were developing in Greece and in its colonies on the Black Sea and Italy.<sup>72</sup> By the Classical period in Athens, we have several references to the Orphic tradition in authors such as Herodotus and Euripides. In the second half of the fifth century, complete theogonies attributed to Orpheus were being compiled and grew in popularity.<sup>73</sup> Between the late fifth and early fourth century, the famous papyrus from Derveni was written.<sup>74</sup> Orphic texts continued to circulate into the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and Orphic philosophy was later studied by early Christian writers and embraced by the Neo-Platonists.<sup>75</sup>

The Orphic texts come to us in several forms. The oldest is the Derveni papyrus,<sup>76</sup> which is unique in that it is a commentary on an existing Orphic theogony. The commentator provides a line-by-line analysis of an Orphic theogony (called the Protogonos Theogony by West). According to later writers, there were two other theogonies of Orpheus in circulation during the Classical and Hellenistic periods: a theogony according to Hieronymus and one according to Eudemus (called by West the Hieronyman and Eudemian Theogonies).<sup>77</sup> In the late Hellenistic period, all the existing Orphic theogonies were compiled into the Rhapsodic Theogony, which is the most well-

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<sup>71</sup> See, for example, West 1971.

<sup>72</sup> West 1983, 259.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>74</sup> Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and Tsantsanoglou 2006, 8-9.

<sup>75</sup> West 1983, 262.

<sup>76</sup> For the most recent and complete text, see Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and Tsantsanoglou 2006.

<sup>77</sup> West 1983, 68-69.

known and quoted by the Neo-Platonists.<sup>78</sup> Besides the theogonies, a set of hymns attributed to Orpheus were composed between the first and fourth centuries A.D. Athanassakis argues for the earlier part of this period because of “the relative purity of the language and the nearly flawless hexameter.”<sup>79</sup> For our purposes, we will look at the Derveni papyrus, some of the Orphic hymns, and a number of fragments preserved in later writers. These include the Neo-Platonists Damascius, Olympiodorus, Syrianus, and his student Proclus, working in the later fifth through early sixth centuries A.D., and the early Christian writers Athenagoras (A.D. 133-190) and Eusebius (A.D. 275-339).<sup>80</sup>

## The Orphic Theogony

### The Birth of Protogonos

Just as we saw in Vedic mythology, the beginning of time in the Orphic theogony is characterized by chaos and a lack of form. According to the Hieronyman Theogony, as summarized by Damascius, the first elements were water and mud, from which the earth was created (“Υδωρ ἦν, φησί, ἐξ ἀρχῆς, καὶ ὕλη, ἐξ ἧς ἐπάγη ἡ γῆ”, δύο ταύτας ἀρχὰς ὑποτιθέμενος πρῶτον, ὕδωρ καὶ γῆν).<sup>81</sup> The first deities to come into existence were abstract and included Time (Χρόνος), Air (Αἰθέρα), and Chaos (Χάος). An Orphic verse preserved in Proclus describes the shapelessness of the universe at this stage in its development:

Αἰθέρα μὲν Χρόνος οὖτος ἀγήραος, ἀφθιτόμητις  
γείατο καὶ μέγα χάσμα πελώριον ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα.

This Time unaging, of immortal resource, begot Aither  
and a great Chasm, vast this way and that (Procl. in Plat. *Rempubl.*  
2.138.14-15).<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>79</sup> Athanassakis 1977, viii.

<sup>80</sup> These fragments have been compiled in Kern 1963 and Bernabé 2004. When available, I will reference the original text, along with the entry in both Kern and Bernabé. As many of these texts are complicated and difficult to find, I have included as much of the Greek text as is reasonable.

<sup>81</sup> Damasc., *De princ.* 1.317.15 (B. 76-80, K. 54).

<sup>82</sup> Cf. B. 105, K. 66; trans. West 1983, 198.

Similar to the description of the universe in RV 10.129, existence begins with a lack of distinction. Instead, abstract gods are created to convey the empty space: time is without age, while the air and the chasm are similar in their vastness. The first tangible object to appear is the primordial egg, which holds the first god who, according to Damascius, was “expressible and acceptable to human ears” (πρώτης ῥητόν τι ἐχούσης καὶ σύμμετρον πρὸς ἀνθρώπων ἀκοάς),<sup>83</sup> Protogonos.

The cosmic egg is one of the most characteristic motifs of the Orphic cosmogony, apparently so well known that it is even referenced in Aristophanes’ *Birds*, in his account of the birth of Eros.<sup>84</sup> Several descriptions of the egg survive in the Orphic fragments. Damascius quotes the following verse:

ἔπειτα δ' ἔτευξε μέγας Χρόνος αἰθέρι δίω  
ὤεδὸν ἀργύφειον.

Then great Time fashioned from (or in) divine Aither a bright white egg (Damasc. *De princ.* 1.318.6).<sup>85</sup>

Elsewhere, Damascius describes the egg as a “bright chiton” (ἀργήτα χιτῶνα), from which the god “leapt out” (ἐκθρώσκει).<sup>86</sup> The birth of the god from the egg is essentially the moment of creation. Previously, the universe was without shape, but the splitting of the egg causes the universe to be divided in half. Athenagoras, in his summary of the Hieronyman Theogony, gives the following description:

οὗτος ὁ Ἡρακλῆς ἐγέννησεν ὑπερμέγεθες ὦν, ὃ  
συμπληρούμενον ὑπὸ βίας τοῦ γεγεννηκότος ἐκ  
παρατριβῆς εἰς δύο ἐρράγη. τὸ μὲν οὖν κατὰ κορυφήν  
αὐτοῦ Οὐρανὸς εἶναι ἐτελέσθη, τὸ δὲ κάτω ἐνεχθὲν Γῆ·  
προῆλθε δὲ καὶ θεὸς † γῆ δισώματος.

This Heracles (= Chronos) generated a huge egg, which, being filled full, by the force of its engenderer was broken in two from friction. Its crown became the heaven, and what had sunk downwards, earth. There also came forth an incorporeal god (Athenag., *Pro Christian.* 18.5.1-5.5).<sup>87</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Cf. B. 75-80, K. 54.

<sup>84</sup> Ar. *Birds*, 693-703. See page 25 for the association between Protogonos and Eros.

<sup>85</sup> Damasc. *De princ.* 1.111.17-18 (B. 114, K. 70); trans. West 1983, 198.

<sup>86</sup> Damasc. *De princ.* 1.317.4 (B. 90, K. 60).

<sup>87</sup> Cf. B. 75-80, K. 57; trans. West 1983, 180.

When Protogonos emerges, an essential duality is created: heaven and earth. Damascius, in his analysis of the Hieronyman Theogony, elaborates on the dualism, which, according to him, starts inside the egg itself. He describes the egg as having both male and female elements, the “dyad of two natures” (ἡ δυὰς τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ φύσεων, ἄρρενος καὶ θηλείας).<sup>88</sup> Along with the duality of male and female comes “the plurality of the various seeds between” (καὶ τῶν ἐν μέσῳ παντοίων σπερμάτων τὸ πλῆθος).<sup>89</sup> The egg naturally provides a creative environment. Previously, Chronos had “fashioned” the egg, or the egg “came into being,” but with the distinction between male and female elements, actual procreation can take place.<sup>90</sup>

The god who emerges from the egg is literally called the “First-born,” or Protogonos. He is a god characterized by plurality: he is both male and female, he has zoomorphic features from various animals, and he has a number of aliases and attributes. The names given to him illustrate the various aspects of his nature, mostly his creative aspect. In the Hieronyman Theogony, he is called Protogonos, Phanes, Zeus, and Pan, while in the Rhapsodies he is additionally called Metis, Eros, Erikepaios, and Bromios. The name Protogonos, as previously said, identifies him as the first god to be born. The name Phanes, which West translates as “the one who makes (or is) Manifest,”<sup>91</sup> reflects his solar nature, as described in one of the Orphic hymns:

ὄσων ὃς σκοτόεσσαν ἀπημαύρωσας ὀμίχλην  
 πάντη δινηθεὶς πτερύγων ῥιπαῖς κατὰ κόσμον  
 λαμπρὸν ἄγων φάος ἀγνόν, ἀφ' οὗ σε Φάνητα κικλήσκω

You scattered the dark mist that lay before your eyes  
 and, flapping your wings, you whirled about, and throughout this world  
 you brought pure light. For this I call you Phanes.<sup>92</sup>

He is called Zeus because, as we will see in the next section, Zeus swallows Protogonos and absorbs his powers. Pan, as West argues, is a later Hellenistic syncretization, derived

<sup>88</sup> Damasc. *De princ.* 1.318.19 (B. 75-80, K. 54). This description of a “bisexual” egg makes sense considering that it is seen as both a womb and seed. For more on early Greek concepts of embryonic development, see Baldry 1932.

<sup>89</sup> Damasc. *De princ.* 1.318.19-20 (B. 75-80, K. 54).

<sup>90</sup> West 1983, 200.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>92</sup> *Orphic Hymn* 6; trans. Athanassakis 1977, 11 (complete text in appendix).

from the meaning of πᾶν as “a cosmic sense of the All.”<sup>93</sup> Metis adds to the god’s androgynous nature, and she is also related to Zeus in that he also swallows her and absorbs her powers, just as in Hesiod’s *Theogony*. The name Eros shows a syncretization with Hesiod and complements Protogonos’ creative role. Erikepaios is obscure and of unknown foreign origin.<sup>94</sup> Finally, Bromios, or “roaring” is a common epithet for Dionysus, and as we will see, in many ways Dionysus resembles Protogonos. In a sense, then, the names attributed to Protogonos allude to what is to come in the fulfillment of the Orphic theogony, from the first king of the gods to the last.

The male and female nature of the egg is manifested again in the sexuality of Protogonos. The androgyny of this god is attested in an Orphic verse preserved by Proclus:

θῆλυς καὶ γενέτωρ κρατερὸς θεὸς Ἑρικεπαῖος

The mighty god Erikepaios (=Protogonos) is female and male.<sup>95</sup>

Just as the egg represented both female and male procreativity, so does that god produced from the egg. His nature is even more divided in the numerous animals depicted on him (Figure 1). Damascius describes him as “an incorporeal god with golden wings on his shoulders, bulls’ heads growing upon his flanks, and on his head a monstrous serpent, presenting the appearance of all kinds of animal forms” (θεὸν ἀσώματον, πτέρυγας ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων ἔχοντα χρυσᾶς, ὃς ἐν μὲν ταῖς λαγόσι προσπεφυκυίας εἶχε ταύρων κεφαλᾶς, ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς κεφαλῆς δράκοντα πελώριον παντοδαπαῖς μορφαῖς θηρίων ἰνδαλλόμενον).<sup>96</sup> Proclus also includes “bright-eyed lions” to the list of heads born by the god.<sup>97</sup> This abundance of animal motifs, along with the god’s androgyny, highlights his creative potential.

Because Protogonos has the sexual organs of both genders, he is unique in his ability to mate with himself in order to give birth to the gods. In a verse quoted by

<sup>93</sup> West 1983, 205.

<sup>94</sup> For a discussion of possible meanings, see Ibid., 205-6.

<sup>95</sup> Procl. in Plat. *Tim.* 1.429.30 (B. 128, K. 81).

<sup>96</sup> Damasc. *De princ.* 1.318.21-319.1 (B. 75-80, K. 54); trans. West 1983, 178-9.

<sup>97</sup> Procl. in Plat. *Tim.* 1.427.24 (K. 79).

Proclus, he is said to bear the seed of the gods (μητιν σπέρμα φέροντα θεόκλυτον).<sup>98</sup>

The creative process begins when desire arises in the god's heart:

ποιμαίνων πραπίδεςσιν ἀνόμματον ὠκὺν Ἔρωτα.

pasturing in his heart swift eyeless love (Procl. in Plat. *Tim* 2.85.27).<sup>99</sup>

As described by West, this form of love is “peculiar in being ‘eyeless,’ not derived from sight of another,” because love is often conceived through the eyes in Greek literature.<sup>100</sup>

Protogonos gives birth to the first gods, among whom is Echidna, who shares his nature of having zoomorphic features. Unlike when Zeus gives birth to Athena from his head or Dionysus from his thigh, both of whom were previously carried by a woman, Protogonos literally and completely gives birth from his own womb, as quoted by Athenagoras:

ἄν δὲ Φάνης ἄλλην γενεὴν τεκνώσατο δεινὴν  
νηδύος ἐξ ἱερῆς, προσιδεῖν φοβερῶπὸν Ἐχιδναν.

And Phanes gave birth to another terrible offspring  
from his sacred womb, Echidna, frightening to see (Athenag. *Pro Christian*. 20.4.7-9).<sup>101</sup>

In addition to giving birth to the first gods, he also creates order in the universe, as in the following verse quoted by Proclus:

μήσατό τ' ἄλλην γαῖαν ἀπείριτον, ἦν τε σελήνην  
ἀθάνατοι κλήζουσιν, ἐπιχθόνιοι δέ τε μήνην,  
ἦ πόλλ' οὐρε' ἔχει, πόλλ' ἄστεα, πολλὰ μέλεθρα·

And he invented the rest of the boundless earth, and the moon  
which the immortals and those upon the earth celebrate,  
who holds many mountains, many cities, and many halls (Procl. in Plat. *Tim*. 2.48.19.21).<sup>102</sup>

In another verse quoted by Syrianus, he is credited with setting the gods and mortals in their place (τὸν τόθ' ἔλὼν διένειμε θεοῖς θνητοῖσί τε κόσμον).<sup>103</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Procl. in Plat. *Tim*. 1.451.3 (B. 140, K. 85).

<sup>99</sup> B. 142, K. 82; trans. West 1983, 207.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>101</sup> B. 84-85, K. 58.

<sup>102</sup> K. 91.

<sup>103</sup> Syrianus in Aristot. *Metaphys*. 182.13 (K. 108).

Such is the beginning in the Orphic theogony. After Protogonos arranges the universe, the theogony continues much as it does in Hesiod following the succession myth of Ouranos, Kronos, and Zeus. Unlike in Hesiod, the dualistic nature seen in Protogonos remains a constant motif in the Orphic theogony, one that reappears in Zeus and Dionysus.

### **The Creation of Zeus**

The role of Zeus in the Orphic theogony differs greatly from his traditional role in Hesiod. Whereas in Hesiod, Zeus establishes his authority through a series of battles, in the Orphic tradition, he takes on a creative role, therefore continuing in the tradition of Protogonos. By combining the meaning from a number of fragments, it is clear that Zeus is instructed by Night (who plays a prophetic role in the Orphic tradition) to swallow Protogonos, and therefore absorb the god's powers. This act is described in the Derveni papyrus, although there is debate of the meaning of the word αἰδοῖον, as seen in the following translations:

“Πρωτογόνου βασιλέως αἰδοῖου τῶι δ’ ἄρα πάντες  
ἀθάνατοι προσέφυν μάκαρες θεοὶ ἠδὲ θέαιναι  
καὶ ποταμοὶ καὶ κρήναι ἐπήρατιο ἄλλα τε πάντα,  
ἄσσα τότε ἦγ γεγαῶτ’, αὐτὸς δ’ ἄρα μόνος ἔγεντο.” (Col. XVI 3-6).<sup>104</sup>

The penis of the first-born king, and on him there grew  
all the immortals, blessed gods and goddesses,  
the rivers, lovely springs and all the rest,  
all that had then been born; he himself alone became.<sup>105</sup>

Of the First-born king, the reverend one; and upon him all  
the immortals grew, blessed gods and goddesses  
and rivers and lovely springs and everything else  
that had then been born; and he himself became the sole one.<sup>106</sup>

Confusion arises because αἰδοῖον can either be taken as a neuter object meaning “genitals” (as in Richard Janko’s translation), or a masculine adjective meaning “revered” modifying an implied “Protogonos” (as in Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and

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<sup>104</sup> Greek text taken from Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and Tsantsanoglou 2006.

<sup>105</sup> Trans. Janko 2002, 33.

<sup>106</sup> Trans. Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and Tsantsanoglou 2006, 134. West takes the same meaning in his translation in West 1983, 88.

Tsantsanoglou's translation).<sup>107</sup> Whatever the case, the outcome is the same for our purposes. Everything that had previously been created directly or indirectly by Protogonos is now reunited within the belly (or womb) of Zeus. Another fragment preserved in Proclus makes it clear that Zeus also took on Protogonos' power:

ὡς τότε Πρωτογόνοιο χανῶν μένος Ἑρικεπαίου  
τῶν πάντων δέμας εἶχεν ἐῆ ἐνὶ γαστέρι κοίλῃ,  
μίξε δ' εἰσὶς μελέεσσι θεοῦ δύνάμιν τε καὶ ἀλκὴν,  
τοῦνεκα σὺν τῷ πάντα Διὸς πάλιν ἐντὸς ἐτύχθη>.

So then, by engulfing Erikepaios the Firstborn,  
he had the body of all things in his belly,  
and he mixed into his own limbs the god's power and strength.  
Because of this, together with him, everything came to be again inside  
Zeus (Procl. in Plat. *Tim.* 1.324.29-7).<sup>108</sup>

Because Zeus has assumed Protogonos' powers, we can assume that he also assumed his ability to give birth. He is therefore able to reenact the original creation. The body of Zeus becomes a microcosm for all existence, much like the Vedic figure of Puruṣa. A so-called "Hymn to Zeus" can be found in many Orphic contexts detailing all the attributes of Zeus in this context. An extended version is quoted in Eusebius, the beginning of which is as follows:

Ζεὺς πρῶτος γένετο, Ζεὺς ὕστατος ἀργικέραυτος,  
Ζεὺς κεφαλή, Ζεὺς μέσσα, Διὸς δ' ἐκ πάντα τέτυκται.  
Ζεὺς ἄρσην γένετο, Ζεὺς ἄφθιτος ἔπλετο νύμφῃ.  
Ζεὺς πυθμὴν γαίης τε καὶ οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος.  
Ζεὺς βασιλεύς, Ζεὺς αὐτὸς ἀπάντων ἀρχιγένεθλος.

Zeus was born first, Zeus last, god of the bright bolt:  
Zeus is the head, Zeus the middle, from Zeus are all things made.  
Zeus was male, Zeus was an immortal nymph.  
Zeus is the foundation of the earth and starry heaven.  
Zeus the king, Zeus the ruler of all, god of the bright bolt (Euseb., *Praep.*  
*ev.* 3.9.2.1-2.5).<sup>109</sup>

<sup>107</sup> For more discussion on the meaning of this word, see Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and Tsantsanoglou 2006, 26-28 and Brisson 2003. Burkert argues that *protogonou* in this line is a reference to Ouranos because of his connection with "the sun" which is discussed by the Derveni commentator (Burkert 2004, 92). Brisson convincingly argues against this interpretation based on the strong association between the epithet and Phanes. In addition, as seen in the next verse quoted from Proclus, Burkert's interpretation is not consistent with the Orphic theogony attested elsewhere.

<sup>108</sup> K. 167; trans. West 1983, 89 (complete text in appendix).

<sup>109</sup> K. 168; trans. *Ibid.*, 89-90. Lines 1-2 and 5 are also attested in the Derveni papyrus (in the appendix)

Many aspects of this poem are reminiscent of Protogonos. There is an altered form of the god's epithet in the first line (πρῶτος γένετο = Protogonos), and Zeus is attributed with all of creation in line two. In addition, here Zeus is explicitly made androgynous in the third line: being both male and a nymph, and in the fourth line, he also contains the duality of earth and heaven. Looking back on the names given to Protogonos in the beginning of the theogony, we can now see why he would be so closely identified with Zeus. In a sense, Zeus becomes Protogonos when he swallows him.<sup>110</sup>

### **Dionysus, the Heir of Protogonos**

As previously stated, Protogonos is also identified with Dionysus through the epithet, Bromios.<sup>111</sup> Many of Dionysus' well-known characteristics can be compared to Protogonos: he is a god of dualities (including male and female), he often assumes the form of a bull, and he has a strong mystery cult following that is often linked with Orpheus even in Antiquity.<sup>112</sup> However, the Dionysus of the Orphic tradition is much more intimately connected to Protogonos and serves as a central figure of worship. In the opening of *Orphic Hymn 30*, he is given a list of epithets that also allude to Protogonos:

πρωτόγονον, διφυῆ, τρίγονον, βακχεῖον ἄνακτα,  
ἄγριον, ἄρρητον, κρύφιον, δικέρωτα, δίμορφον,

Primeval, two-natured, thrice-born, Bacchic lord,  
savage, ineffable, secretive, two-horned, and two-shaped (*Orphic Hymn 30*).<sup>113</sup>

What Apostolos Athanassakis translates as “primeval” is a direct allusion to the name of Protogonos; and like his predecessor, Dionysus is two-natured, two-horned, two-shaped, and secretive; his dualistic nature is here highlighted. He is called thrice-born because in the Orphic genealogy, he is the son of Zeus and Persephone,<sup>114</sup> a fact that is sometimes

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>111</sup> This name is attested in Procl. in Plat. *Tim.* 1.336.9 (K. 170).

<sup>112</sup> See, for example, Herodotus 2.81.

<sup>113</sup> Trans. Athanassakis 1977, 43.

<sup>114</sup> *Orphic Hymn 30.6-7.*

reconciled with Hesiod and Homer by having Dionysus reborn from Semele and then Zeus, as in the popular tradition.<sup>115</sup>

In the Orphic tradition, Dionysus is much more than the god of the vine; he is a dying and rising fertility god and a source of personal salvation for those who worship him. Eusebius recounts the story of the death of Dionysus, saying that the Titans boil the dismembered limbs of the child Dionysus in a kettle (οἱ δὲ Τιτᾶνες, οἱ καὶ διασπάσαντες αὐτόν, λέβητά τινα τρίποδι ἐπιθέντες καὶ τοῦ Διονύσου ἐμβαλόντες τὰ μέλη καθήψουν πρότερον), then roast him on a spit (ἔπειτα ὀβελίσκοις ἀμπεύραντες ὑπεύρεχον Ἑφραίστοιο), and eat the roasted “sacrificial meat” (τάχα που τῆς κνίσης τῶν ὀπτωμένων κρεῶν μεταλαβών). Athena rescues the heart of Dionysus, which is said to still be beating (Ἀθηνᾶ μὲν οὖν τὴν καρδίαν τοῦ Διονύσου ὑφελομένη Παλλὰς ἐκ τοῦ πάλλειν τὴν καρδίαν), from which Zeus is able to recreate the god and bring him back to life. In his anger, Zeus strikes the Titans with a thunder bolt (κεραυνῶ τοὺς Τιτᾶνας αἰκίζεται).<sup>116</sup> According to Olympiodorus, Zeus then creates a new race of mortals from the ashes of the Titans (καὶ ἐκ τῆς αἰθάλης τῶν ἀτμῶν τῶν ἀναδοθέντων ἐξ αὐτῶν ὕλης γενομένης γενέσθαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους).<sup>117</sup> That narrative is supported by the Orphic hymn to the Titans:

ἀρχαὶ καὶ πηγαὶ πάντων θνητῶν πολυμόχθων,  
εἰναλίων πτηνῶν τε καὶ οἱ χθόνα ναετάουσιν·  
ἐξ ὑμέων γὰρ πᾶσα πέλει γενεὰ κατὰ κόσμον.

From you stem all toiling mortals,  
the creatures of the sea and of the land, and birds,  
and all generations of this world come from you (*Orphic Hymn* 37.4-6).<sup>118</sup>

Therefore, mortals embody the earthly aspects of the Titans as chthonic deities, along with the smoke from the divine thunderbolt of Zeus. This combination of dualities connects mortals to the long line of dualistic figures in the Orphic theogony, from Protogonos to Dionysus.

<sup>115</sup> Athanassakis 1977, 121-122.

<sup>116</sup> Euseb. *Praep. ev.* 2.3.25 (K. 35).

<sup>117</sup> Olympiod. in Plat. *Phaedon.* 2.21 (K. 220).

<sup>118</sup> Trans. Athanassakis 1977, 53.

The story of Dionysus' death and rebirth is of profound significance for the followers of Orpheus. Early twentieth-century scholars tentatively suggested that there might be a connection between Orphic doctrine and Dionysiac ritual; that hypothesis has become increasingly accepted with the growing number of archaeological finds in the second half of the century.<sup>119</sup> The most significant discoveries have been the famous Orphic tablets: bone tablets in Olbia (figure 2) and gold leaves in Southern Italy both often associated with graves. The three bone tablets found in the Black Sea in 1951 have the following inscriptions:

Tablet A

βίος θάνατος βίος	Life death life
ἀλήθεια	truth
Διό(νυσος) Ὀρφικοί or Ὀρφικόν	Dio(nysus) Orphics [or Orphic]

Tablet B

εἰρήνη πόλεμος	Pear war
ἀλήθεια ψεῦδος	truth lie
Διόν(υσος)	Dion(ysus)

Tablet C

Διο(νυσο)	Dio(nysus)
ἀλήθεια	truth
σῶμα ψυχή	body soul <sup>120</sup>

A number of conclusions can be drawn from these tablets. First, the Greek community in Olbia was worshipping Dionysus and Orpheus together as early as the fifth century B.C.<sup>121</sup> More importantly for our purposes, it is clear that Dionysus and Orpheus were paired with dualities, and they have a connection to the soul, life, and death. West suggests that these tablets were a kind of membership token for the Orphics that would serve as passports to the underworld.<sup>122</sup> This suggestion is supported by the use of the

<sup>119</sup> Burkert 1977, Robertson 2002.

<sup>120</sup> *SEG* 28.659-61. Text and translation from Graf and Johnston 2007, 185-187. First published by Rusyaeva 1978. See also Tinnefeld 1980 and West 1983, 17.

<sup>121</sup> For more on the Orphic following in Olbia, see West 1982.

<sup>122</sup> West 1983, 18.

gold tablets, which are clearly instructions for the deceased on navigating the underworld, in Greece and Southern Italy.<sup>123</sup> One gold tablet found in Hipponion in 1969 reads:

The sacred path of Memory: when you are about to die.  
In the well-fitting house of Hades: there is a spring to the right,  
and a white cypress stands next to it:  
There the souls of corpses go down and grow cold.  
Don't go near this spring.  
In front of it you will find cold water flowing from  
Memory from the lake: and there are guards standing near,  
and they will ask you, speaking with prudence,  
what you search for in the gloom of dark Hades.  
Say: "I am a child of Earth and starry Heaven,  
I am dry with thirst and ruined: but give me quickly  
the cold water to drink of Memory from the lake."  
And indeed they will pity you, king, under the earth,  
and indeed they will give of Memory from the lake to drink.  
And indeed you, drinking it, will go on the sacred path which the others also,  
the famous *mystai* and the *bacchoi*, marched on.<sup>124</sup>

Again in this text, we see a strong connection between Orpheus and Dionysus, since these tablets are clearly Orphic in content, and here explicitly for the *bacchoi*, the followers of Dionysus. Also in this text, we have another duality, as in the bone tablets from Olbia, in the phrase: "I am a child of Earth and starry Heaven." This phrase, found in many of the gold tablets, is an allusion to man's Titanic nature, since according to the Orphic theogony, man was created from the ashes of the Titans.<sup>125</sup>

The implication drawn from these texts is that those initiated into the cult of Dionysus received secret Orphic doctrines that enable them to have safe passage in the underworld. Scholars such as West have argued that perhaps the initiation ritual reenacted the dismemberment and rebirth of Dionysus, which would explain for the Dionysiac practice of *omophagia*. In this case, the sacrificial animal would replace the initiate at the last moment, and when the participants ate the raw flesh, they were in essence eating the flesh of Dionysus.<sup>126</sup> In this way, the initiate assumes the powers of

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<sup>123</sup> For the most recent collection, see Graf and Johnston 2007; also in Carratelli 1975 and Zuntz 1971.

<sup>124</sup> My translation based on Carratelli's edition (Carratelli 1975, 39).

<sup>125</sup> Also found in tablets from Petelia, line 6; Entella, line 12; Eleutherna (1-5), line 3; Mylopotamos, line 3; Rethymnon 2, line 3; Pharsalos, line 8; and in Tablet 29 (from an unknown place in Thessaly, from Graf and Johnston's edition), line 3. For a discussion on the interpretation of this phrase, see West 1983, 164-166; Guthrie 1952, 174-175; and Seaford 1986, 5.

<sup>126</sup> West 1983, 160.

Dionysus and gains control over death. It should also be remembered that Dionysus serves as the representative of his mother, Persephone. Another gold tablet from Pelinna, which reads “Tell Persephone that *Bacchios* himself has set you free” (εἰπεῖν Φερσεφόνοι σ’ ὅτι Βάκχιος αὐτος ἔλυσε),<sup>127</sup> illustrates the importance of this relationship to the deceased Orphic.

In conclusion, we can draw a line from the beginning of time, through Protogonos, down to Dionysus and his followers. As seen in the tablet from Hipponion, mortals are “the children of earth and heaven,” both of which were first created in the breaking of the cosmic egg at Protogonos’ birth. But initiates also partake of the flesh of Dionysus, assuming his powers over life and death, in the same way that Zeus had swallowed Protogonos, and thereby taken on his powers of self-procreation. The one constant feature continuous throughout is a dualistic nature. Protogonos was described as both male and female; when Zeus swallows him, he is given a string of feminine attributes. Dionysus is characteristically androgynous, and his worship shows a degree of transvestism.<sup>128</sup> Therefore, not only does the initiate conquer death, he participates in (and more importantly, *understands*) a dualistic nature that reaches back to the beginning of time and defines the nature of the universe.

### Poetics of the *Orphica*

The power behind the actual words of the Orphic texts lies in their hidden meaning. The commentator of the Derveni papyrus says “[Orpheus] himself did not intend to say contentious riddles but rather great things in riddles” ([κε]ῖ [’Ορφεὺ]ς αὐτ[ὸ]ς [ἐ]ριστ’ αἰν[ί]γματ[α] οὐκ ἤθελε λέγειν, [ἐν αἰν]ίγμασ[ι]ν δὲ [μεγ]άλα),<sup>129</sup> and that these words were for “[those] who are pure in hearing” (τῆ]ν ἀκοήν [ἀγνεὺ]ντας).<sup>130</sup> It is clear throughout the Derveni papyrus that the commentator believes that even though

<sup>127</sup> Pelinna (II B 3) 2; cf. Robertson 2002, 219.

<sup>128</sup> For example, when Pentheus dresses up as a woman in Euripides’ *Bacchae*, he begins to hallucinate, and Dionysus tells him that now he sees “what is necessary for you to see” (line 924). For more on cross-dressing in Dionysiac ritual, see Seaford 1981, 259.

<sup>129</sup> Col. VII 5-6; trans. Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and Tsantsanoglou 2006, 130.

<sup>130</sup> Col. VII 11; trans. Ibid., 131. Seaford connects this riddling nature of the Derveni papyrus with the obscure text of the Olbia tablets. See Seaford 1986, 21.

others may hear the words of Orpheus, only the initiated can grasp their true meaning. But as was the case with the poetics of the *Rigveda*, Orphic poetry holds meanings not only in its words, but also in the art of its poetics, through its use of meter, themes, and formulae. The poet uses these devices to draw attention to deeper meanings, thereby making the poetry itself part of the religious experience.

### Metrics

The attested meter for Orphic texts—the fragments, hymns, the Derveni papyrus, and the gold tablets—is dactylic hexameter, the same meter used by the epic poets. Gregory Nagy argues that the dactylic hexameter is an archaic meter that shares its roots with Indic meter. Nagy’s famous work on the formula “imperishable fame” in both Greek and Indic has shown that meter and formula work together.<sup>131</sup> The poet uses the meter in order to draw attention to the formula, which, in our case, holds specific meaning. In addition, the caesura, or natural line-break, can separate material in the line for added emphasis.

One feature that is consistent throughout the Orphic texts is the use of an Adonic formula ( - ~ ~ - - ) at the end of the line. This is seen most typically with epithets of Protoponos:

Proclus, in Plat. *Tim* 1.324.29  
ὥς τότε Πρωτογόνοιο χανῶν μένος Ἥρικεπαίου

*Orphic Hymn* 6.1  
Πρωτόγονον καλέω διφυῆ, μέγαν, αἰθερόπλαγκτον

*Orphic Hymn* 6.4  
σπέρμα πολύμνηστον, πολυόργιον, Ἥρικεπαίου

The same Adonic formula is also with an epithet of Zeus after he swallows Protoponos:

Derveni papyrus, col. XVIa<sup>132</sup>  
Ζεὺς πρῶτος γένετο, Ζεὺς ὕστατος ἀργικέραυτος

<sup>131</sup> Nagy 1974.

<sup>132</sup> This verse (fr. 14.1 B.), which is included in Janko’s version of the papyrus (Janko 2002, 32), is missing on the actual papyrus. However, Kouremenos argues that we can “plausibly assume” that the quoted Orphic verse could have been originally included because the adjective ὕστατος is discussed in col. xvii (Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and Tsantsanoglou 2006, 219 n. 6).

Derveni papyrus col. XIX.10  
Ζεὺς βασιλεύς, Ζεὺς δ' ἀρχὸς ἀπάντων ἀργικέραυτος

Another Adonic epithet is used to describe the rites of Protogonos:

*Orphic Hymn* 6.11  
ἐς τελετὴν ἀγίαν πολυποίκιλον ὀργιοφάνταις

In each of the above cases, a formula is placed in the metrical verse in such a way as to bring attention to a certain aspect of the god. The obscure name of Protogonos, Erikepaios, is highlighted, along with his “ether-tossed” origins, while Zeus’ use of the thunderbolt is highlighted in his hymn.

The poet also uses the position of the caesura in order to bring attention to a god’s name and his attributes. In this passage quoted by Proclus, the name of Protogonos falls directly before the caesura, which is then followed by his attributes:

Proclus, in Plat. *Tim.* 1.324.29  
ὡς τότε Πρωτογόνοιο || χανῶν μένος Ἑρικεπαίου

Again, in the “Hymn to Zeus” in the Derveni papyrus, in three lines out of the four, a caesura comes directly before the name of Zeus:

Col. XVIa  
Ζεὺς πρῶτος γένητο, || Ζεὺς ὕστατος ἀργικέραυτος

Col. XVII.12  
Ζεὺς κεφα[λή, Ζεὺς μέσ]σα, || Διὸς δ' ἐκ [π]άντα τέτ[υκται.]

Col. XVII.a<sup>133</sup>  
Ζεὺς πνοιὴ πάντων, || Ζεὺς πάντων ἔπλετο Μοῖρα

Elsewhere, the caesura is used to divide other formulae, especially in the description of all the elements that are brought into Zeus’ belly after he swallows Protogonos:

αἰθέρος εὐρείης || ἠδ' οὐρανοῦ ἀγλαὸν ὕψος,  
πόντου τ' ἀτρυγέτου || γαίης τ' ἔρικυδέος ἔδρη,  
᾿Ωκεανός τε μέγας || καὶ νεῖατα τάρταρα γαίης

<sup>133</sup> Here, as in note 132 above, the verse is a hypothetical reconstruction, again “quite plausible” (Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and Tsantsanoglou 2006, 227). The verse (fr. 14.3 B.) is included in Janko’s text and the restoration was first suggested in Merkelbach 1967, 24.

**the broad air** and the lofty splendor of heaven,  
**the undraining sea** and the earth's glorious seat,  
**great Oceanus** and the lowest Tartara of the earth (Procl. in Plat. *Tim.*  
1.313.10-12).

The placement of the caesura creates a rhythmic pattern that contributes to the listing quality of this verse. The full expanse that is brought into Zeus is detailed in a list of natural elements, and the shape of the meter sets these elements apart from each other.

### Phonetic Themes

A number of phonetic and grammatical features are employed in these texts in order to enhance the poetics and to heighten the experience of the participant. As is typical in an inflected language, phonetics and grammar often work together to create rhymes, but the poet can strategically place repeated sounds in a verse in order to create a larger pattern, as in the following verse:

Derveni papyrus, col. XIX.10  
Ζεὺς βασιλεύς, Ζεὺς δ' ἀρχὸς ἀπάντων ἀργικέραυτος.

The line begins with a repetition of *-eus*, and closes with a repetition of *-os*, interlaced with varying combinations of *a* and *r*. A similar pattern can be seen in the following line from the hymn to Protogonos:

*Orphic Hymn* 6.5  
σπέρμα πολύμνηστον, πολυόργιον, Ἑρικεπαῖον

A verse of only four words, two are compounds beginning with *poly-*, which are framed in the middle of the line. In addition, the last three words all end in *-on*. There are other examples of framing, as in the previous verse, which serve as grammatical features. Because Greek word order is relatively free, the poet is able to form shapes with his words, as in the following chiasmic verse:

Procl. in Plat. *Tim.* 1.324.30  
τῶν πάντων δέμας εἶχεν ἐὴ ἐνὶ γαστέρι κοίλη

The end of the line forms a chiasmus, both in meaning and in rhyme with ἐὴ κοίλη and ἐνὶ γαστέρι.

## Formulae

We have already seen many formulae in our discussion of meter, but Watkins lays out many types of formulae besides the traditional epithets. As seen in the previous chapter, there are two kinds of formulae: simple designators, which include quantifiers and qualifiers, and complex figures. The prevailing theme in the Orphic texts is totality—Protogonos creates everything, and Zeus recreates everything—and this is reflected in the formulae that are used. The two most common types of formula are simple quantifiers (argument + counter argument, such as “here and there”) and complex merisms (A + B = C, such as “barley and spelt”), both of which express a totality of the notion. The following are examples of simple quantifiers:

Procl. in Plat. *Tim* 1.313.11-12  
πόντου τ' ἀτρυγέτου γαίης τ' ἔρικυδέος ἔδρη,  
Ὠκεανός τε μέγας καὶ νεΐατα τάρταρα γαίης

the undraining **sea** and **earth's** glorious seat,  
great **Oceanus** and the lowest Tartara of the **earth**

Derveni papyrus col. XVI a  
Ζεὺς πρῶτος γένετο, Ζεὺς ὕστατος ἀργικέραυτος

Zeus was born **first**, Zeus of the shining bolt was **last**

Each of these verses pair opposites together in order to express the completeness of the notion, either the vastness of the universe swallowed by Zeus, or the eternal nature of Zeus himself. Similarly, a merism joins two objects together to express totality.<sup>134</sup> The following are examples found in the Orphic texts:

Procl. in Plat. *Tim*. 1.313.14  
πάντες τ' ἀθάνατοι μάκαρες **θεοὶ** ἠδὲ **θείαιναι**,  
and all the immortal blessed **gods and goddesses**

*Orphic Hymn* 6.3  
ταυροβόαν, γένεσιν μακάρων **θνητῶν** τ' **ἀνθρώπων**,  
he bellows like a bull, this begetter of blessed **gods and mortal men**

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<sup>134</sup> Watkins 1995, 45; cf. 18

The first verse refers to all the gods, both male and female, that Zeus recreates, while the second example refers to the totality of Protogonos' creation, since he created both gods and men.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, when the gods of the Orphic theogony are examined from this poetic perspective, we can see how much they were intimately connected, especially in the case of Protogonos and Zeus. The poet has used meter, phonetics, grammar and formulae to connect the two gods and make them one. They share common epithets and attributes, and they both are highlighted as creative beings. First Protogonos creates the entire universe, and when Zeus swallows him, he swallows all of his creation with him in order to restore the universe. The worshipper shares in this process not only through ritual, as we saw with the followers of Dionysus, but also in the reading of the sacred texts. The burial tablets illustrate just how powerful the words of Orpheus were, as they were believed to hold power over death.

FIGURES



Figure 1: Protogonos. Relief in Modena. Second century AD, after Guthrie 1952, pl. 12.

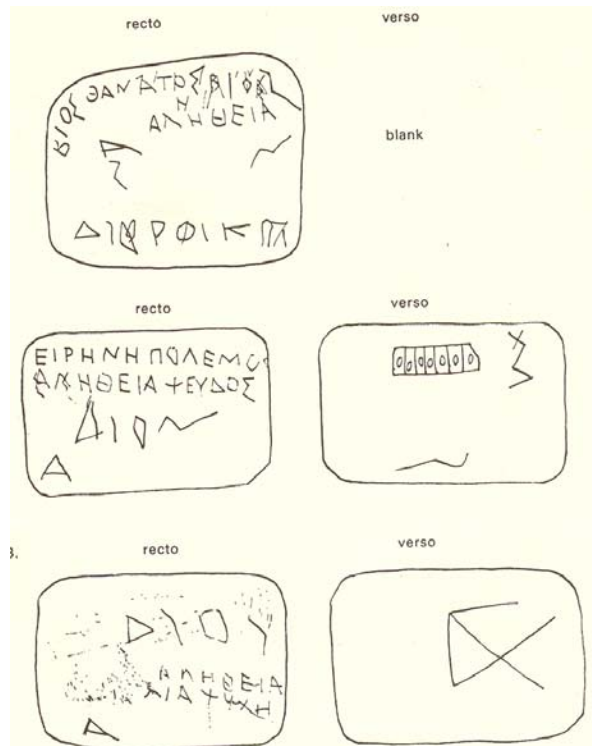


Figure 2: Bone plates from Olbia. Fifth century B.C., after West 1983, 19.

CHAPTER 3  
COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY AND POETICS

**Introduction**

Now that we have studied the Vedic and Orphic material individually, we can examine the similarities in their mythology and poetics. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the results of this comparison and to paint a picture of the possible diffusion routes between India and Greece. The Orphic and Vedic mythologies share a number of elements, from the figures of Prajāpati and Protogonos (complemented by Puruṣa on the one hand, and Zeus and Dionysus on the other) to the development of the cosmos and the respective role these gods played in creation. In addition, these mythologies have a similar place in Vedic and Orphic religious beliefs and rituals. In both traditions, the worshipper participates in either the cosmic creation or the death and rebirth of the god through his experience of the text. The texts themselves were composed and preserved with similar techniques of metrics, phonetics, and formulae.

**Comparative Mythology**

**Creative Gods**

As cosmogonic texts, the *Rig Veda* and Orphic theogonies both describe the beginning of time and the origins of creation. In both theogonies, the emergence of an egg marks the first spark of creation. Prior to its appearance, the universe had been characterized by a lack of duality and distinction. In the Vedas, this concept is philosophically articulated in RV 10.129, the “Creation Hymn,” by the juxtaposition of opposites: “there was neither non-existence nor existence then” (RV 10.129.1), and “there was neither death nor immortality” (RV 10.129.2).<sup>135</sup> In the Orphic Theogony, the same concept is articulated in the form of abstract deities, such as Time, Air, and Chaos. The absence of forms and dualities is “personified” in the figure of Chasm, who is “vast

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<sup>135</sup> Cf. page 9.

this way and that” (Procl. in Plat. *Rempubl.* 2.138.15).<sup>136</sup> In each tradition, the darkness is broken by the emergence of the cosmic egg, which first embodied the duality of male and female. Wendy Doniger’s interpretation of the Vedic egg should be extended to the Orphic egg as well: the cosmic egg symbolizes both the male and female procreative elements (the womb and the sperm) and is therefore a “continuum of androgynous birth images.”<sup>137</sup>

The births of Prajāpati and Protogonos mark the first creation. As the god emerges, the realm of heaven and earth becomes defined. In RV 10.129, as previously discussed, the beginning of time showed a complete lack of duality. Singularity arises in line 3 with “the one” (*ekah*). As discussed in chapter two, this figure is associated with Prajāpati because he was the first god and the source of creation. While in this poem the emergence of dualities is applied to abstract notions, in RV 10.121 the duality is more concrete when Prajāpati is said to separate heaven and earth (RV 10.121.5). Similarly, in the Hieronyman Theogony according to Athenagoras, Time (in the form of a snake) squeezed the cosmic egg and the shell separates into heaven and earth (Athenag., *Pro Christian.* 18.5.1-5.5).<sup>138</sup> The god himself embodies the duality of male and female—Protogonos is explicitly androgynous,<sup>139</sup> and we can assume that Prajāpati is androgynous both because of the bisexual nature of the golden egg and because of his procreative abilities.

According to RV 10.129, three elements contributed to the first creation of Prajāpati:

*tapasas tan mahinājāyataikem*  
*kāmas tad agre sam avartatādhi*  
*manaso retaḥ prathamam yad āsīt*

That one arose through the power of **heat**.  
**Desire** came upon that one in the beginning;  
that was the first seed of **mind** (RV 10.129.3-4).<sup>140</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Cf. page 22.

<sup>137</sup> Doniger 1981, 27; cf. page 9.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. page 23.

<sup>139</sup> Procl. in Plat. *Tim.* 1.429.30; cf. page 25.

<sup>140</sup> Notice the vertical arrangement of the key words in the verse. For similar examples in both Vedic and Greek, see Watkins 1995, 39-40.

These elements are also found in the creation of Protogonos. As stated above, the cosmic egg was broken by friction, ἐκ παρατριβῆς (Athenag. *Pro Christian.* 18.5), literally “from rubbing along side,” from the preposition παρά, “along” and the noun τριβή, “a rubbing.” Both *tapas* and τριβή share a meaning of “practice,” which, in the Vedic context, refers to religious asceticism.<sup>141</sup> Protogonos also experienced a desire, a “swift eyeless love,” (ἀνόμματος ὠκὺν Ἔρωτα)<sup>142</sup> Here, Eros is used in his abstract sense, just as *kāma* is the abstract word for love or desire in Vedic. Protogonos is also the first to perceive and therefore have a mind in the Orphic theogony.<sup>143</sup> In the Derveni papyrus, the mind functions as its own abstract god (Νοῦς), and the commentator understands the mind to be synonymous with Zeus after he swallows Protogonos.<sup>144</sup> In addition, to both Prajāpati and Protogonos are attributed the creation of order in the universe. They arrange the cosmos: Prajāpati is said to make the earth and sky firm,<sup>145</sup> while Protogonos is said to establish a place for men and gods.<sup>146</sup> They also create the sun and moon, and natural features such as mountains, rivers, the ocean. And, of course, they create gods and men.<sup>147</sup>

Another element that Prajāpati and Protogonos have in common is their syncretization with other gods, in particular the *highest* god. According to Vyas, *prajāpati* was originally an epithet attributed to a number of Vedic deities, and the development of Prajāpati as a creator-god was the result of Vedic philosophy defining an

<sup>141</sup> The basic meaning of *tapas* given by Monier-Williams 1964 is “warmth, heat,” from the verb *tap*, “to give out heat.” The metaphorical meaning of the noun more common to religious contexts is “religious austerity, bodily mortification, penance, severe meditation, special observance,” as in RV 9.113, 2; x. This meaning is also given to the verbal form as “to undergo self-mortification, practice austerity,” as in the Taittiriya Upanishad 2.6 (“He performed austerities. Having performed austerities, He created all this”), and also “to cause pain to,” as in AV. 19.28.2 (“Burning the spirit of the foe, vexing the heart of enemies”). Similarly, the basic meaning of τριβή given in Liddell and Scott 1996 is “rubbing,” from the verb τρίβω, “to rub.” But the more common meaning is metaphorical: “rubbing down, wearing away,” as in A. *Ag.* 465 (παλιντυχεῖ τριβᾶ “wearing away his fortunes”), from the verbal meaning “to bruise, pound,” as in Ar. *Th.* 486 (ὁ μὲν ἔτριβε κεδρίδας ἄνηθον σφάκον, “he was pounding juniper, dill, and sage”), which is comparable to the Vedic meaning “to cause pain.” More importantly, another meaning is “practice,” as in X. *An.* 5.6.15 (μᾶλα ἤδη διὰ τὴν τριβὴν ἱκανούς, “now very efficient through practice”), which is comparable to the Vedic meaning of “religious austerity.”

<sup>142</sup> Procl. in Plat. *Tim.* 1.451.3; cf. page 26.

<sup>143</sup> See description in Procl. in Plat. *Tim.* 2.85.23 (K. 82).

<sup>144</sup> Col. XVI.8-15.

<sup>145</sup> RV 10.121.5

<sup>146</sup> Syrianus in Aristot. *Metaphys.* 182.13

<sup>147</sup> Similar to Hesiod’s races of men, in the Orphic theogony the first golden race was created by Phanes (=Protogonos). See Procl. in *Rempubl.* 2.74.26 (K. 140).

“Absolute,” a source for all being.<sup>148</sup> Later in the Upanishads, Prajāpati became identified with Brahman, the more well-known supreme god of Hinduism. Protogonos is also associated with other Greek gods: Metis, Eros, Erikepaios, Bromios (=Dionysus), and, most importantly, Zeus.<sup>149</sup> Both Brahman and Zeus are the traditional supreme gods in their respective religions, and in their assimilation with the first-born creator-god, they take on the powers of creation and hold the totality of the universe. In this aspect, Zeus can also be compared to the Vedic Puruṣa in that his body becomes a microcosm of the universe. Eusebius’ “Hymn to Zeus” says, “Zeus is the head, Zeus the middle... Zeus is the foundation of the earth and starry heaven” (*Praep. ev.* 3.9.2.2-4). Similarly, Puruṣa is said to have “pervaded the earth on all sides and extended beyond it as far as ten fingers” (RV 10.91.1), and Prajāpati also holds “the quarters of the sky in his two arms” (RV 10.121.4). But Zeus is unlike these Vedic gods in the reproduction of the world. He simply recreates everything in his stomach, while Puruṣa and Prajāpati are dismembered, and their many parts form the cosmos.

### Dying and Rising Gods

As discussed in chapter two, once Zeus swallowed Protogonos, the first-born god’s nature lives on through Zeus and his son, Dionysus. Not only is Dionysus an heir to Protogonos’ original rule, but he shares many of his characteristics: he is androgynous and is often manifested as a bull, which alludes to Protogonos’ zoomorphic figure. In the Orphic Hymn to Dionysus he is even called πρῶτόγονον, which literally means “first-born.”<sup>150</sup> It is therefore appropriate to compare Prajāpati to Dionysus in their roles as dying and rising gods. Both gods were dismembered and reassembled in their respective mythological traditions, and both the participant in Vedic and Orphic ritual participate in the death and rebirth of god, therefore sharing in the god’s power.

In Prajāpati’s association with Puruṣa, his body is dismembered by the gods in a sacrifice, and his limbs form the cosmos. Elsewhere, Prajāpati is compared to the annual

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<sup>148</sup> Vyas 1978.

<sup>149</sup> West argues that both Prajāpati and Protogonos can be translated as Pro-geni-potens, “able to bear forth” (1983, 105). However, this interpretation does not make sense based on the etymology of their names—*prajā*, “procreation, birth” (i.e. offspring), *-pati*, “lord, master” and *proto*, “first,” *-gonos*, “that which is begotten.” If we want to make a parallel between the two names etymologically, then we must take *proto* as “first” both in a temporal and hierarchical sense.

<sup>150</sup> *Orphic Hymn* 30, line 2; cf. page 29.

year, his body parts being the individual bricks that make up the sacrificial altar. In the annual ritual of building the altar, the participants are ritually rebuilding Prajāpati.<sup>151</sup> According to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, this ritual serves as an initiation for those involved: on the large scale, they participate in the creation of the cosmos through Prajāpati, and on the personal level they gain power over death by sharing in the god's reunification and rebirth. The initiatory aspect of such a ritual is more explicit in the cult of Dionysus. Here the ritual is specifically for the purpose of an individual's initiation. Hypothetically, the participants would reenact the death of Dionysus, substituting a sacrificial animal at the last moment.<sup>152</sup> Then, in the practice of *omophagia*, the initiates eat the raw flesh of the sacrificial animal, which now represents the flesh of Dionysus. We know from the burial tablets that the result of this initiation was that the individual gained salvation from death. He gains secret knowledge of the underworld and good favor with Persephone, the mother of Dionysus.

### Comparative Poetics

We have already seen how important these texts were to Vedic and Orphic ritual practice, but the writing, reading, and transmission of the texts themselves was also a religious process. The *Rig Veda* itself is a ritual text; its main purpose is to preserve ritual and to be utilized in the rituals. Its mythological nature or praise hymns are complementary to that basic purpose. The Orphic material is less ritualistic, and therefore serves a different purpose. Just as with Hesiod's traditional theogony, the Orphic theogony is a mythical narrative, the purpose of which is to instruct the reader of the origin and nature of the gods and men. Ritual aspects of Orphic literature are found more in the burial tablets, which can be seen as functioning only in burial ritual.

Many of the other differences between Vedic and Orphic literature are a result of their very different histories. The hymns of the *Rig Veda* were orally preserved from some time in the second millennium and are still relatively intact today. The Orphic texts,

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<sup>151</sup> ŚB 10.4.2; cf. page 12.

<sup>152</sup> West 1983.

on the other hand, were not part of one continuous tradition. They were composed at different times and different places. As West says, when we speak of Orphics, we must always ask “Which Orphics?”<sup>153</sup> These texts were also not the central religious texts of the Greek world, as the Vedas were in India. Orphism was just one aspect of a very complicated and multiplicitous Greek religion. For the most part, they survive in fragments or are relatively late in composition, such as with the *Orphic Hymns*.

Nevertheless, the texts of both traditions share poetic features. They were both composed orally and with religious intent. As such, it is important to examine them for their poetic value in addition to analyzing their content. As we have seen in our examination of each text, the poet utilizes meter, themes, formulae, and other poetic features in order to draw attention to significant aspects of his work. As Gregory Nagy says, the poems of the *Rig Veda* were intended for a divine audience, and this had an effect on the composition.<sup>154</sup> The same can be said of the Orphic material, more so than with the Hesiodic tradition, because of the secretive nature of Orphic belief.

## Metrics

When scholars discovered that the Indic and Greek phrases *śrāvas akṣitam* and κλέος ἄφθιτον (“imperishable fame”) were cognate, they also found a metrical similarity in the positioning of the two phrases in the verses in which they appeared. Gregory Nagy, in a detailed analysis of these formulae, argues that not only are formula and meter related, but meter was shaped over time by the insertion of Indo-European formulae (such as “imperishable fame”). For example, dactylic hexameter, he argues, is the result of inserting dactylic formulae into a pre-existing, more archaic meter. Therefore examination of formulae is essential for understanding how Greek and Indic meter are related. Nagy argues that caesuras, or natural breaks in the verse, mark the beginning and end not only of metrical units, but more importantly of formulae, and therefore we will use the caesura as a point of comparison.

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>154</sup> Nagy 1974, 16-17.

When we examine the nature of the caesura in both the Vedic and Greek verses, we find that the position directly before the break often contains either the name of a god or a reference to him. The following is a list of relevant examples:

**hiranyagarbhaḥ** || samavartatāgre  
bhūtasya **jātaḥ** || patireka āsīt  
In the beginning the **Golden Embryo** arose.  
Once he was **born**, he was the one lord of creation (RV 121.1a-b).

eka id **rājā** || jagato babhūva  
He became the one **king** of the world (RV 121.3b).

**yasyeme** || himavanto mahitvā  
**He who** owns the snowy mountains (RV 121.4a).

**yasyemāḥ** || pradiśo yasya bāhū  
**Who has** the quarters of the sky as his two arms (RV 121.4c).

**prajāpate** || na tvad etāny anyo  
**Prajāpati**, no one but you... (RV 121.10a).

Αἰθέρα μὲν **Χρόνος** || οὔτος ἀγήραος, ἀφθιτόμητις  
This **Time**, unaging, of immortal resource, begot Aither (Procl. in Plat. *Rempubl.* 2.138.14).

ὥς τότε **Πρωτογόνοιο** || χανῶν μένος Ἑρικεπαίου  
So then, by engulfing Erikepaios the **Firstborn** (Procl. in Plat. *Tim.* 1.324.29).

Ζεὺς πρῶτος γένετο, **Ζεὺς** || ὕστατος ἀργικέραυτος,  
Ζεὺς κεφαλή, **Ζεὺς** || μέσσα, Διὸς δ' ἐκ πάντα τέτυκται.  
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 the head, **Zeus** is center, all things are from Zeus.  
Zeus was the breath of all, **Zeus** was their fate.  
Zeus the king, **Zeus** ruler of all, he of the shining bolt (Derвени papyrus col. XVI-XIX).

ἄρρητον, κρύφιον **ροιζήτορα**, || παμφαἴες ἔρνος,  
ineffable, hidden, **brilliant scion**, whose motion is whirring (*Orphic Hymn* 6.5).

ἄγριον, ἄρρητον, **κρύφιον**, || δικέρωτα, δίμορφον,  
savage, ineffable, **secretive**, two-horned and two-shaped (*Orphic Hymn* 30.3).

In addition to preceding the caesura, these names and epithets also form their own metrical units, supporting Nagy’s theory that the insertion of formulae shaped the development of the meter, not *visa versa*. Specifically in the last verse cited, where the first three words are dactyls (  $\bar{\text{~}}\text{~}\text{~}$  ), the formulae support Nagy’s theory of internal expansion, which led to formation of the dactylic hexameter. Both the Greek and the Vedic verses employ the same technique of inserting the name of the god before the caesura. Especially when the name comprises its own metrical foot, this practice shows a shared practice of metrical composition; both the *triṣṭhubh* and dactylic hexameter are formed by the insertion of formulae. In this case, the formulae are references to the god.

### Phonetic Themes

Besides the previously cited examples, other names and references to the gods are typically found at the beginning or the end of the verse. This trend is not necessarily a result of metrical formation, and will therefore be dealt with as a thematic element.<sup>155</sup> The following lists the placement of names and references to the various gods, either at the beginning or end of the verse, or on either side of the caesura.

Table 1: Metrical Positions of Epithets

	Initial	Caesura	Final
<b>Prajāpati</b>	1		
garbhaḥ (embryo)	2		
jan (to be born)		5	2
pati (lord)		2	
saḥ (pronoun)	2		

<sup>155</sup> As seen in chapter 2, however, epithets in Greek in the verse-final position generally form an Adonic foot.

Table 1 Continued

καὴ (interrogative pronoun)	9		
γαὶ (relative pronoun)	17	5	
εκαὶ (the one)	1	2	3
<b>Protogonos</b>	1	1	
Ἡρικεπαῖος			3 (Adonic)
αἰθερόπλαγκτον (ether-tossed)			1 (Adonic)
ὠιογενῆ (egg-born)	1		
ταυροβόαν (bull-bellowing)	1		
<b>Zeus</b>	4	4	
ἀργικέραυνος (shining bolt)			2 (Adonic)
<b>Dionysus</b>			
εὐαστήρα (loud-roaring)			1
πρωτόγονον (first-born)	1		

As we can see, most of the references occur in the verse initial position. In addition, all but one of the verse-final Greek references are Adonic formulae. By placing the name of the god, either directly or indirectly, in these positions of emphasis, the poet is calling attention to the god. In this way the poet magnifies his praise for the god, and he increases his chances of invoking the right god in the right way.<sup>156</sup> It is important to remember that the poet was not only writing for a mortal audience, and many of the more obscure or hidden messages found in themes and meter might have been intended for a divine audience.

<sup>156</sup> Gonda 1959, 33-34.

## Formulae

As we have seen in the analysis of Vedic and Orphic formulae, the purpose of the formulae used is to express the totality of a notion. Whether the poet is describing heaven and earth, land and sea, mortals and immortals, gods and goddesses, (i.e. A and B), the effect is to emphasize the full extent of a god's power. A striking similarity is the formation of these formulae within the verse. In most cases, element A and element B are separated by the caesura, as in the following:

*sa dādhāra || pṛthivīm dyām utemām*  
He held in place the **earth** and this **sky** (RV 10.121.1).

*yena dyaur ugrā || pṛthivī ca dṛlhā*  
He by whom the **awesome sky** and the **earth** were made firm (RV 10.121.5).

Ζεὺς πυθμὴν γαίης τε καὶ || οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος. Zeus is the foundation of the **earth** and starry **heaven** (Euseb., *Praep. ev.* 3.9.2.4).

In these examples, heaven and earth are not only separated and held in order by the god, but also by the metrical structure. The poet mirrors his message in the shape of the words themselves. Therefore, the totality expressed in the meaning of the words is further enforced by metrical arrangement.

## CONCLUSION

Now that we have examined the similarities between the Vedic and Orphic mythology and poetics, we must make an attempt at explaining them. According to Jaan Puhvel, there are three basic explanations for commonalities in mythology: they are universal to human nature; they arose from a common source; or they diffused from one culture to another.<sup>157</sup> Some of the previously examined similarities are basic motifs in mythology throughout the world, such as the separation of earth and heaven. Other motifs can be traced to Indo-European origins, and finally some were transmitted in some form from India to Greece, most likely via the ancient Near East.<sup>158</sup>

As said before, the main question to be answered is to what extent the common themes in these two traditions developed indigenously or were either imported or borrowed. This task is simplified greatly for our purposes when we consider Colin Renfrew's argument that the term "Indo-European" should be used to describe a language group, not necessarily a cultural group.<sup>159</sup> We can then easily attribute the poetic commonality to a shared parent language, without having to deal with the question of where the Indo-Europeans came from and when they entered India or Greece. The consequence of this argument is to establish a base line for comparison: at the very least we can say that the Vedic and Orphic theogonies share a common poetic language. Some of the similarities in the mythology might then be a result of the common poetic features. For example, the all-encompassing nature of the gods might be a result of the already established formulaic constructions.<sup>160</sup> As a result, our task is now to explain mythological commonalities by placing each mythical tradition into a historical context.

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<sup>157</sup> Puhvel 1987, 3-4.

<sup>158</sup> See Table 2 in the appendix for a timeline of Indian, Near Eastern, and Greek history.

<sup>159</sup> Renfrew 1990, 76.

<sup>160</sup> However, the reverse could also be argued if we assume that the god came from a common source also, so that the formulaic features developed in order to describe an already existing god.

## Indo-Europeans and Shamanism

A popular explanation among classicists for the origins of Orphism is to attribute it to the spread of Shamanism. One of the hypothetical homelands for the Indo-Europeans is in or close to definitively shamanic areas. Strictly speaking, “Shamanism” as a term describing a specific religious practice should be restricted to Siberia, since the word itself is from the Tungus language.<sup>161</sup> From a geographical standpoint, Shamanism in Siberia provides a tempting source of Indo-European motifs. According to Marija Gimbutas, the homeland of the Indo-European can be found in in the Kurgan culture of Central Asia (8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.), which is close enough to shamanic areas to explain shamanic motifs found in the burials.<sup>162</sup> The nomads of the Kurgan culture then migrated to the Black Sea, where they would later form the Scythian, Sarmatian, and Thracian cultures. According to West’s theory, this is the route by which the shamanic elements of Orphism traveled to Greece (Figure 3).<sup>163</sup> E. R. Dodds went as far as to say that Orpheus himself was a shaman, and therefore any characteristically “non-Greek” motifs in Orphism came from Thracian shamanism.<sup>164</sup>

The most obvious shamanic motif that we have seen in the Vedic and Orphic material is that of death and dismemberment. During the shaman's initiation, he would often either be ritually dismembered or hallucinate a dismemberment.<sup>165</sup> In this way he gained power over death and could then heal sickness in his community. The same principle applies to the many dismembered figures in Vedic and Orphic myth. When Prajāpati is reassembled in the sacrificial altar, he provides continuity for the following year, and those involved in the ritual share in his death and resurrection. In the same way,

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<sup>161</sup> The word “Shamanism” tends to be used indiscriminately and without context. For our discussion, I will attempt to avoid this mistake by distinguishing between “Shamanism” in the strict sense and “shamanic” motifs. For more on methodology in the study of Shamanism, see Kehoe 2000.

<sup>162</sup> Gimbutas 1977.

<sup>163</sup> West 1983, 146-150.

<sup>164</sup> Dodds 1951, 147. The problem with Dodds’ interpretation is that the Orpheus he is discussing is a Greek construction based on the Greek conception of Thracian religion. Much more can be said about the shamanic nature of Orpheus himself, especially in that he travelled to the underworld for the purpose of retrieving a lost soul.

<sup>165</sup> Eliade 1964, 34 ff.

the followers of Dionysus reenact and share in his death and dismemberment in their initiation rituals as a way to overcome death.<sup>166</sup>

Another shamanic motif found in these myths is androgyny. One of the functions of a shaman is to mediate between dualities, one of which is the duality of male and female. Therefore, shamans would often go through a gender transformation as part of the initiation ritual.<sup>167</sup> The implication is that the shaman has gained control over both male and female powers, just as the primordial gods, Prajāpati and Protogonos, were androgynous and could therefore self-procreate. In the Orphic mythology, this power is passed on to Zeus when he becomes pregnant after swallowing Protogonos and gives birth to the cosmos. Dionysus is also androgynous in his appearance, and inspires transvestitism in his followers.<sup>168</sup>

The theory of shamanic influence, however, is not without problems. It can be argued that similarities between Vedic, Orphic, and shamanic practices are universal to the human religious experience. For example, trans-gendering initiations can also be seen in Native American practices. While some scholars still call such practices “Shamanism,” such lack of discrimination can lead to methodological problems. It is necessary to attempt to distinguish between universal motifs and those that are specifically shamanic. While it is possible that shamanic beliefs from Siberia did in fact travel to Greece in the form of Orphism, these motifs may also be, as Dodds says, “rooted in man’s psycho-physical make-up, and that something of the kind may therefore have appeared among the Greeks independently of foreign influence.”<sup>169</sup> From the Greek perspective, the words of Orpheus would have been seen as Thracian and therefore inspired non-Greek, “shamanic” tendencies, even if the mythology was ultimately a Greek construction. Likewise, the words of Orpheus could have come from a Thracian source, which possibly had traces of shamanic elements from the Thracians’ roots in the Kurgan culture.

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<sup>166</sup> See West 1983, 146 for his comparison of shamanic and Dionysiac initiation rituals.

<sup>167</sup> Eliade 1964, 257-8. This practice is also attested among the Scythians with the Enarieis, who were said to suffer from the “female disease” (Herodotus 1.105).

<sup>168</sup> Seaford 1981. For example, consider Pentheus’ cross-dressing in Euripides’ *Bacchae*.

<sup>169</sup> Dodds 1951, 161 n. 32.

## Near Eastern Influence and Transmission

Another possible explanation for commonalities between Vedism and Orphism is the shared interaction between the Near East and both India and Greece. It has long been accepted that Greece was heavily influenced by the Near East during its early stages of development in the Orientalizing Revolution. What is not always taken into consideration is that while the Near East held sway in the Mediterranean, it was also extending its influence eastward into Bactria and India as early as the time of the Sumerian Empire. Martin West argues that Near Eastern influence on archaic Greek culture is mirrored in the development of Vedic Indian culture.<sup>170</sup> Through a series of trade networks, the Near East became a meeting ground for multiple cultures through which religious and philosophical ideas could be transmitted across a great distance (Figure 4 and Figure 5). The question becomes one of direction. Either these motifs were extending out from the Near East into both India and Greece, or Greek and Indian ideas were passing through the Near East.

The earliest and best attested contact between the Near East and India occurred along the trade route that was first established by the Babylonians along the Persian Gulf.<sup>171</sup> Casson argues that this contact took place as early as the middle of the fourth millennium B.C.,<sup>172</sup> and that trade between the Near East and India is firmly established archaeologically by the third millennium B.C. Thus, an Indian chank—a large, white conch shell found only in India and Ceylon—along with carnelian and lapis lazuli beads from Afghanistan from the third millennium have been found in Mesopotamia. Sumerian documents mention that these materials, along with timber, gold, and ivory, came from “Maluhha,” which Casson argues must refer to the Indus Valley civilizations, as India is the only place where all these materials can be found and exported to the Near East.<sup>173</sup> Fairservis also argues that elements of Near Eastern culture can be seen in the Indus Valley cultures, as reflected in Akkadian stylistic motifs found on female figurines from

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<sup>170</sup> West 1997, 4-5.

<sup>171</sup> Casson 1991, 4.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

Harappa.<sup>174</sup> He attributes this similarity to the spread of influence from Early Dynastic Sumeria, which reached as far as Baluchistan (modern Pakistan).<sup>175</sup>

There is also textual evidence of a connection between the Hittites and the development of Vedic language in the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries B.C. Hittite kings mentioned in cuneiform tablets have Aryan names, and these kings worshipped the traditional Vedic gods: Indra, Mitra, Varuna, and the Aśvins.<sup>176</sup> By the Middle Vedic period, trade was fairly consistent between India and the Near East, which would explain the appearance of Akkadian words in the *Atharva Veda*, and McEvelley argues that Near Eastern religious themes are perhaps reflected in the pantheistic hymns in the tenth book of the *Rig Veda*.<sup>177</sup>

In the West, trade flourished between the Near East and the Minoans from 1800 to 1500 B.C. The Minoan route covered mainland Greece, Rhodes, Cyprus, Asia Minor, and the Levant.<sup>178</sup> The same general route was continued by the Mycenaeans between 1500 and 1200 B.C.<sup>179</sup> The most important result of this interaction for the Greeks was the adoption of the Phoenician alphabet during the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.<sup>180</sup> As argued by Walter Burkert, the fact that the Greeks learned the Phoenician alphabet indicates something about the nature of trade at this time: “It is clear that the adoption of the Phoenician script by the Greeks was more than the copying of letter forms; it included the transmission of the technique of teaching and learning how to read and write. This presupposes a certain intimacy of contacts.”<sup>181</sup> According to this claim, material goods were not the only thing being traded; cultural elements and potentially religious and philosophical ideas were also traveling across the seas. In fact, this cultural diffusion seems to be reflected in the attestation of many Greeks from the Archaic period who did

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<sup>174</sup> Fairservis 1971, 283.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>176</sup> Rawlinson 1926, 2.

<sup>177</sup> McEvelley 2002, 4.

<sup>178</sup> Casson 1991, 19.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>180</sup> Woodhead 1967, 14.

<sup>181</sup> Burkert 1992, 29.

Near Eastern lineage, such as Pherecydes of Syros who was the son of Babys, an Anatolian name.<sup>182</sup>

From as early as 1500 B.C. trade networks reached completely from Greece to India, and even into Central Asia and China. These were the early roots of the later vast Silk Road.<sup>183</sup> Even though it is unlikely that Greeks and Indians would have had direct contact by these means, they surely would have been dealing with people who had to a certain degree. The Near East was definitely a factor in the development of both early Vedic and Greek cultures, and it is very possible that a degree of syncretization occurred between these various trading groups.

Near Eastern influence on the development of Greek theogonies has been greatly discussed in relation to Hesiod's *Theogony*. The same influence can also be seen on the Orphic theogony, even more so because of the strong presence of non-Greek motifs that are absent in Hesiod's version. The best candidates for comparison with the Greek theogonies are the *Kumarbi Cycle* in Hittite<sup>184</sup> and *Enûma Eliš* in Sumerian.<sup>185</sup> In the *Kumarbi Cycle*, the god Kumarbi overthrows the sky god, Anu, by biting off and swallowing his genitals, and other gods are subsequently born from him.<sup>186</sup> This narrative mirrors the Orphic myth of the Derveni papyrus (as translated by Richard Janko), in which Zeus swallows the genitals of Protogonos and later gives birth to the cosmos. In *Enûma Eliš*, the succession myth of Apsû, Ea, and Marduk mirrors that of Ouranos, Kronos, and Zeus in both Hesiod and in the Orphic theogony.<sup>187</sup> On the basis of the succession myth and its strong presence in multiple Greek theogonies as early as the Archaic period, West argues that it had been present in Greece since the Mycenaean Age.<sup>188</sup> From this perspective, Hesiod's *Theogony* is a "hellenized" version of an already established foreign myth. The similarities between the Vedic Prajāpati and the Orphic Protogonos are evidence of the foreign nature of this theogony. In addition, the egg-born

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<sup>182</sup> Pherecydes of Syros is a particularly interesting example since he introduces many Near Eastern motifs into Greek philosophy and shares many features with Orphism (West 1971). Another example is Thales of Miletus, son of Examyces, a Carian name (West 1997).

<sup>183</sup> McEvelley 2002, 4.

<sup>184</sup> Hoffner 1998, 42-65.

<sup>185</sup> Foster 1995, 9-51.

<sup>186</sup> Summarized by West 1966, 20-21.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

god motif is attested in Zoroastrian and Egyptian mythology.<sup>189</sup> The seeds of the Orphic tradition, based on the arguments of West, would have been planted early on in the development of Greek philosophy, but as we have seen, the Orphic tradition was diverse chronologically and geographically. At different locations and at different times, the various Orphic writers could have been influenced by established traditions, Near Eastern trade contacts, members of the Persian court (which could have included Indian philosophers), or by any other number of contacts in the Greek colonies (such as in Olbia on the Black Sea). These many possibilities in varying degrees account for the many similarities between the Vedic and Orphic theogony.

If common seeds were planted for the Vedic and Orphic tradition as a result of early trade with the Near East, these commonalities would have been reinforced later in the Classical period through direct interaction in the Persian court. As the Persian Empire expanded, its kings utilized specialists and workers from surrounding areas. Cyrus expanded the empire west into Asia Minor and brought many prominent Greek cities under Persian control, including Miletus, Colophon, Ephesus, and Samos. In the east, Bactria and Gandhāra were also subjected to the Persian Empire.<sup>190</sup> At the capital in Persepolis, foreigners from various parts of the empire came together into a melting pot of culture.<sup>191</sup> The Persepolis documents under Darius I mention by name a number of Indians who were within Persepolis on state business.<sup>192</sup> In addition, both Persian and Greek written evidence shows that many Greeks were active in Persepolis. These included physicians, scholars, and artisans working within the higher classes of Persian society.<sup>193</sup> Martin West argues that it is likely that upper-class Greeks and Indians would have interacted in the context of the Persian court, thus allowing for cultural diffusion.<sup>194</sup>

A number of Greek texts also show that the Greeks were at least vaguely familiar with India. The most striking is the now lost work of Scylax, whose work is known indirectly through Herodotus. Scylax was commissioned by the Persians to sail to India in 517 B.C., and he was a source for both Hecataeus and Herodotus in the composition of

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<sup>189</sup> West 1983, 104-106.

<sup>190</sup> McEvelley 2002, 6.

<sup>191</sup> Dandamaev and Lukonin 1989, 292-93.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>194</sup> West 1997, 624.

their histories.<sup>195</sup> Hecateus, writing around 500 B.C., included eight Indian place-names in his work, and Herodotus, in the fourth book of his *Histories*, mentioned the voyage of Scylax, after which he says, “Darius subdued the Indians and used their sea” (Ἰνδούς τε κατεστρέψατο Δαρεῖος καὶ τῆ θαλάσση ταύτη ἐχρᾶτο).<sup>196</sup> Herodotus discusses India elsewhere, and even though most of his information is incorrect, he does seem to be familiar with some ascetic practices, saying that they “kill no living creature, nor sow, nor live in houses” (οὔτε κτείνουσι οὐδὲν ἔμψυχον οὔτε τι σπείρουσι οὔτε οἰκίας νομίζουσι ἐκτῆσθαι ποιηφάγουσι τε).<sup>197</sup> McEvelley notes that within the Jain and Ajivika traditions, initiates would wander far into other countries.<sup>198</sup> This would explain for seemingly Indian characteristics that appear in later Greek philosophy and religion.

## Conclusions

McEvelley describes these cross-cultural interactions as “not a structure of parallel straight lines—one labeled ‘Greece,’ another ‘Persia,’ another ‘India’—but a tangled web in which an element in one culture often leads to elements in others.”<sup>199</sup> When all possible sources of commonalities are considered, we see just how complex this web of interaction was. The development of Vedic and Orphic religion, and the development of the language used to express religious stories and rituals, was a long and complicated process beginning with the elusive Proto-Indo-European tradition. Seeds were planted already in prehistoric times that would later reflex so-called “shamanistic” characteristics in each tradition. As each culture developed linguistically, they were at the same time in close contact with the Near East, a time period in which mythologies and deities were transmitted across vast lands while trade flourished. In Greece specifically, the mystical teachings of Orpheus were embraced from an early time, and Greek writers incorporated this foreign musician into the canon of great poets who revealed the truth about the gods

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<sup>195</sup> McEvelley 2002, 8.

<sup>196</sup> Her. *Hist.* 4.44.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid. 3.100.

<sup>198</sup> McEvelley 2002, 17; cf. Daniélou 1982, 28.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 1.

and men. Both the Vedic and Orphic tradition reveal secret truths about life and death, mortality and immortality, and the dualistic nature of the world through the art of poetry. As our knowledge of Indo-European language and culture grows, more textual and archaeological evidence will shed light on what is already present in the texts of the *Rig Veda* and the various Orphic texts.

## FIGURES

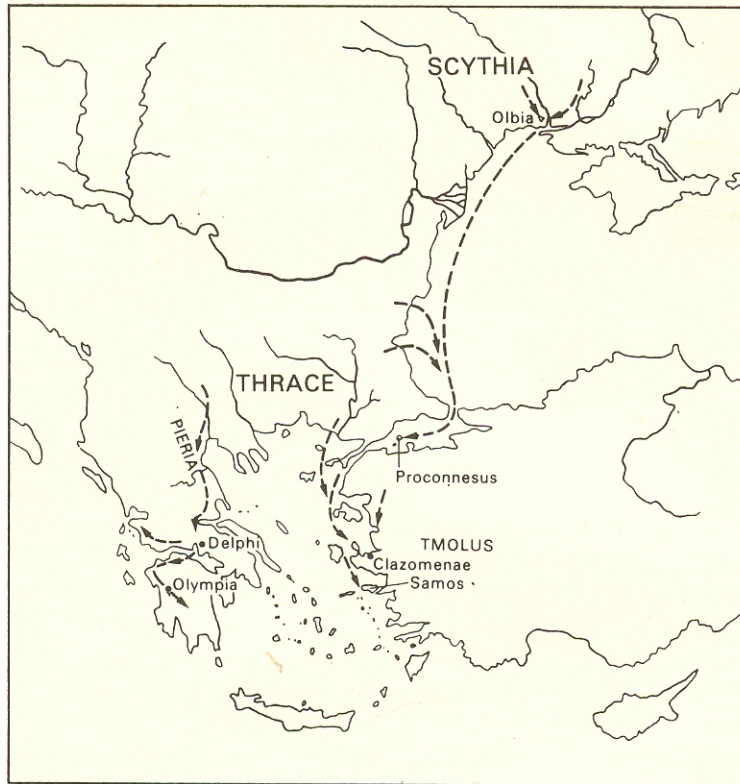


Figure 3: Patterns of shamanistic influence in Bronze Age and Archaic Greece, after West 1983, 148.

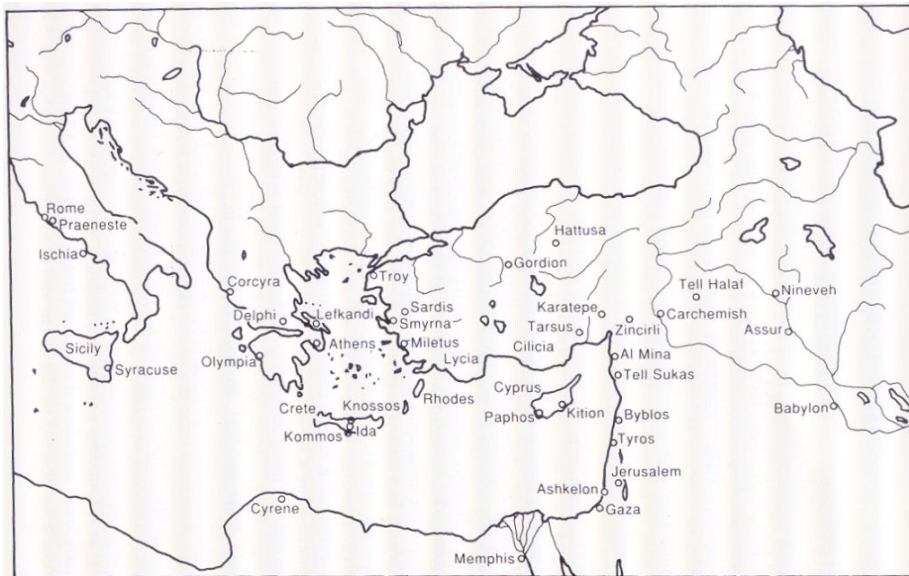


Figure 4: The Near East and Mediterranean during the Early Archaic Period, After Burkert 1992, 10.

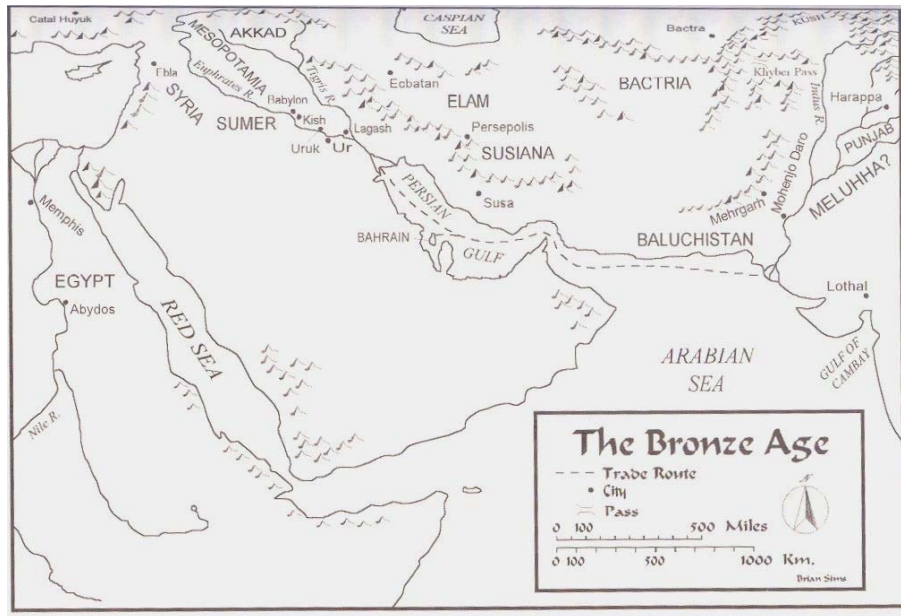


Figure 5: The Early Babylonian Trade Route to India, After McEvelley 2002, 239.

## APPENDIX

Rigveda 10.121

हिरण्यगर्भः समवर्तताग्रे भूतस्य जातः पतिरेकासीत् ।  
स दाधार पृथिवीं द्यामुतेमां कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥१॥  
य आत्मदा बलदा यस्य विश्वा उपासते प्रशिषं यस्य देवाः ।  
यस्य छायामृतं यस्य मृत्युः कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥२॥  
यः प्राणतो निमिषतो महित्वैक इद् राजा जगतो बभूव ।  
य ईशे अस्य द्विपदश्चतुष्पदः कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥३॥  
यस्येमे हिमवन्तो महित्वा यस्य समुद्रम् रसया सहाहुः ।  
यस्येमाः प्रदिशो यस्य बाहू कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥४॥  
येन द्यौरुग्रा पृथिवी च दृळ्हा येन स्वः स्तभितं येन नाकः ।  
यो अन्तरिक्षे रजसो विमानः कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥५॥  
यं क्रन्दसी अवसा तस्तभाने अभ्यैक्षेतां मनसाराजमाने ।  
यत्राधि सूर उदितो विभाति कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥६॥  
आपो ह यद् बृहतीर्विश्वमायन् गर्भन् दधानाजनयन्तीरग्निम् ।  
ततो देवानाम् समवर्ततासुरेकः कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥७॥  
यश्चिदापो महिना पर्यपश्यद्दक्षन् दधानाजनयन्तीर्यज्ञाम् ।  
यो देवेषु देव एक आसीत् कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥८॥  
मा नो हिंसीज्जनिता यः पृथिव्या यो वा दिवंसत्यधर्मा जजान ।  
यश्चापश्चन्द्रा बृहर्जजान कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥९॥  
प्रजापते न त्वदेतान्यन्यो विश्वा जातानि परि तावभूव ।

यत्कामास्ते जुहुमस्तन् नो अस्तु वयम् स्याम पतयोरयीणाम् ॥१० ॥

hiranyagarbhaḥ samavartatāgre bhūtasya jātaḥ patireka āsīt |  
sa dādāhāra pṛthivīm dyām utemām kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema ||1||  
ya ātmadā baladā yasya viśvā upāsate praśiṣaṃ yasya devāḥ |  
yasya chāyāmṛtaṃ yasya mṛtyuḥ kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema ||2||  
yaḥ prānato nimisato mahi tvaika id rājā jagato babhūva |  
ya īśe asya dvipadaś catuṣpadaḥ kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema ||3||  
yasyeme himavanto mahitvā yasya samudram rasayā sahāhuḥ |  
yasyemāḥ pradīśo yasya bāhū kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema ||4||  
yena dyaur ugrā pṛthivī ca dṛlḥā yena svaḥ stabhitaṃ yena nākaḥ |  
yo antarikṣe rajaso vimānaḥ kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema ||5||  
yaṃ krandasī avasā tastabhāne abhyaikṣetām manasā rājamāne |  
yatrādhi sūra udito vibhāti kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema ||6||  
āpo ha yad bṛhatīr viśvam āyan garbhan dadhānā janayantīr agnim |  
tato devānām samavartatāsur ekaḥ kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema ||7||  
yaś cid āpo mahinā paryapaśyad dakṣan dadhānā janayantīr yajñām |  
yo deveṣu deva eka āsīt kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema ||8||  
mā no hiṃsīj janitā yaḥ pṛthivyā yo vā divaṃ satyadharmā jajāna |  
yaś cāpaś candrā bṛhātīr jajāna kasmai devāya haviṣāvidhema ||9||  
prajāpate na tvad etāny anyo viśvā jātāni pari tā babhūva |  
yatkāmās te juhumaṣ tan no astu vayam syāma patayo rayīṇām ||10||

1. In the beginning the Golden Embryo arose. Once he was born, he was the one lord of creation. He held in place the earth and this sky. Who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?
2. He who gives life, who gives strength, whose command all the gods, his own, obey; his shadow is immortality—and death. Who is the god we should worship with the oblation?

3. He who by his greatness became the one king of the world that breathes and blinks, who rules over his two-footed and four-footed creatures—who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?
4. He who through his power owns these snowy mountains, and the ocean together with the river Rasā, they say; who has the quarters of the sky as his two arms—who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?
5. He by whom the awesome sky and the earth were made firm, by whom the dome of the sky was propped up, and the sun, who measured out the middle realm of space—who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?
6. He to whom the two opposed masses looked with trembling in their hearts, supported by his help, on whom the rising sun shines down—who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?
7. When the high waters came, pregnant with the embryo that is everything, bringing forth fire, he arose from that as the one life's breath of the gods. Who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?
8. He who in his greatness looked over the waters, which were pregnant with Daksa, bringing forth the sacrifice, he who was the one god among all the gods—who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?
9. Let him not harm us, he who fathered the earth and created the sky, whose laws are true, who created the high, shining waters. Who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?
10. O Prajāpati, lord of progeny, no one but you embraces all these creatures. Grant us the desires for which we offer you oblation. Let us be lords of riches.

*Rig Veda* 10.129

नासदासीन् नो सदासीत् तदानीं नासीद् रजो नो व्योमापरो यत् ।

किमावरीवः कुह कस्य शर्मन्नम्भः किमासीद् गहनं गभीरम् ॥१॥

न मृत्युरासीदमृतं न तर्हि न रात्र्या अह्ना आसीत् प्रकेतः ।

आनीदवातं सवचया तदेकं तस्माद्धान्यन् न परः किं चनास ॥२॥

तम आसीत् तमसा गूळ्हमग्रे ऽप्रकेतं सलिलं सर्वमा इदम् ।  
 तुछ्येनाभ्वपिहितं यदासीत् तपसस्तन्महिनाजायतैकम् ॥३॥  
 कामस्तदग्रे समवत्रराधि मनसो रेतः परथमं यदासीत् ।  
 सतो बन्धुमसति निरविन्दन् हृदि परतीष्याकवयो मनीषा ॥४॥  
 तिरश्चीनो विततो रश्मिरेषामधः स्विदासीदुपरि स्विदासीत् ।  
 रेतोधा आसन् महिमान आसन्त् स्वधा अवस्तात् प्रयतिः परस्तात् ॥५॥  
 को अद्धा वेद क इह प्र वोचत् कुत आजाता कुत इयं विसृष्टिः ।  
 अर्वाङ् देवा अस्य विसर्जनिनाथा को वेद यताबभूव ॥६॥  
 इयं विसृष्टिर्यत आबभूव यदि वा दधे यदि वा न ।  
 यो अस्याध्यक्षः परमे व्योमन्त् सो अङ्ग वेद यदि वा नवेद ॥७॥

nāsadāsīn no sadāsīta tadānīm nāsīd rajo no vyomāparo yat |  
 kimāvarīvaḥ kuha kasya śarmannambhaḥ kimāsīd gahanam gabhīram ||1||  
 na mṛtyurāsīdamṛtaṃ na tarhi na rātryā ahna āsīt praketaḥ |  
 ānīdavātaṃ savacayā tadekaṃ tasmāddhānyan na paraḥ kiṃ canāsa ||2||  
 tama āsīt tamasā gūlhamagre ‘praketaṃ salilaṃ sarvamā idam |  
 tuchyenābhvapihitaṃ yadāsīt tapas astanmahinā jāyataikam ||3||  
 kāmastadagre samavatrārādhi manaso retaḥ parathamam yadāsīt |  
 sato banchumasati niravindan hr̥di paratīṣyākavayo manīṣā ||4||  
 tīraścīno vitato raśmireṣāmadhaḥ svidāsīdupari svidāsīt |  
 retodhā āsan mahimāna āsant svadhā avastāt prayatiḥ parastāt ||5||  
 ko addhā veda ka iha pra vocat kuta ājātā kuta iyaṃvirsṛṣṭiḥ |  
 arvāṅ devā asya visarjanenāthā ko veda yatābabhūva ||6||  
 iyaṃ viṣṛṣṭiryata ābabhūva yadi vā dadhe yadi vā na |  
 yo asyādhyakṣaḥ parame vyomant so aṅga veda yadi vā naveda ||7||

1. There was neither non-existence nor existence then; there was neither the realm of space nor the sky which is beyond. What stirred? Where? In whose protection? Was there water, bottomlessly deep?
2. There was neither death nor immortality then. There was no distinguishing sign of night nor day. That one breathed, windless, by its own impulse. Other than that there was nothing beyond.

3. Darkness was hidden by darkness in the beginning; with no distinguishing sign, all this was water. The life force that was covered with emptiness, that one arose through the power of heat.

4. Desire came upon that one in the beginning; that was the first seed of mind. Poets seeking in their heart with wisdom found the bond of existence in non-existence.

5. Their cord was extended across. Was there below? Was there above? There were seed-placers; there were powers. There was impulse beneath; there was giving-forth above.

6. Who really knows? Who will here proclaim it? Whence was it produced? Whence is this creation? The gods came afterwards, with the creation of this universe. Who then knows whence it has arisen?

7. Whence this creation had arisen—perhaps it formed itself, or perhaps it did not—the one who looks down on it, in the highest heaven, only he knows—or perhaps he does not know.<sup>200</sup>

Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* 1.324.29-325.3 (K. 167, B. 241)

ὥς τότε Πρωτογόνοιο χανῶν μένος Ἡρικεπαίου  
τῶν πάντων δέμας εἶχεν ἐῆ ἐνὶ γαστέρι κοίλη,  
μῖξε δ' ἐοῖς μελέεσσι θεοῦ δύναμιν τε καὶ ἀλκὴν,  
τοῦνεκα σὺν τῷ πάντα Διὸς πάλιν ἐντὸς ἐτύχθη.

Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* 1.313.9-16 (K. 167 continued)

τοῦνεκα σὺν τῷ πάντα Διὸς πάλιν ἐντὸς ἐτύχθη  
αιθέρος εὐρείης ἢ δ' οὐρανοῦ ἀγλαὸν ὕψος,  
πόντου τ' ἀτρογέτου γαίης τ' ἐρικυδέος ἕδρη,  
Ὠκεανός τε μέγας καὶ νείατα τάρταρα γαίης  
καὶ ποταμοὶ καὶ πόντος ἀπείριτος ἄλλα τε πάντα  
πάντες τ' ἀθάνατοι μάκαρες θεοὶ ἠδὲ θέαιναι,  
ὅσσα τ' ἔην γεγαῶτα καὶ ὕστερον ὀππὸς' ἔμελλεν,  
ἐγγένετο, Ζηνὸς δ' ἐνὶ γαστέρι σύρρα πεφύκει>.

Translation by M.L. West<sup>201</sup>

<sup>200</sup> Translations from Doniger 1981.

<sup>201</sup> West 1983, 89.

So then, by engulfing Erikepaios the Firstborn,  
he had the body of all things in his belly,  
and he mixed into his own limbs the god's power and strength.  
Because of this, together with him, everything came to be again inside  
Zeus,  
the broad air and the lofty splendor of heaven,  
the undraining sea and earth's glorious seat,  
great Oceanus and the lowest Tartara of the earth,  
rivers and boundless sea and everything else,  
and all the immortal blessed gods and goddesses,  
all that had existed and all that was to exist afterwards  
became one and grew together in the belly of Zeus.

“Hymn” to Zeus as reconstructed from the Derveni Papyrus col. XVI-XIX

Ζεὺς πρῶτος γένετο, Ζεὺς ὕστατος ἀργικέραυνος,  
Ζεὺς κεφαλή, Ζεὺς μέσσα, Διὸς δ' ἐκ πάντα τέτυκται.  
Ζεὺς πνοιὴ πάντων, Ζεὺς πάντων ἔπλετο Μοῖρα  
Ζεὺς βασιλεύς, Ζεὺς δ' ἀρχὸς ἀπάντων ἀργικέραυνος.

Translation by. R. Janko<sup>202</sup>

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

*Orphic Hymn 6 (Kern 87)*

<Πρωτογόνου>, θυμίαμα σμύρναν.

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<sup>202</sup> Janko 2002, 32-39.

Πρωτόγονον καλέω διφυῆ, μέγαν, αἰθερόπλαγκτον,  
ὠιογενῆ, χρυσέαισιν ἀγαλλόμενον πτερούγεσσι,  
ταυροβόαν, γένεσιν μακάρων θνητῶν τ' ἀνθρώπων,  
σπέρμα πολύμνηστον, πολυόργιον, Ἑρικεπαῖον,  
ἄρρητον, κρύφιον ῥοιζήτορα, παμφαῆς ἕρνος,  
ὄσσων ὃς σκοτόεσσαν ἀπημαύρωσας ὀμίχλην  
πάντη δινηθεῖς πτερούγων ῥιπαῖς κατὰ κόσμον  
λαμπρὸν ἄγων φάος ἀγνόν, ἀφ' οὗ σε Φάνητα κικλήσκω  
ἠδὲ Πρίηπον ἄνακτα καὶ Ἀνταύγην ἐλίκωπον.  
ἀλλά, μάκαρ, πολύμητι, πολύσπορε, βαῖνε γεγηθῶς  
ἔς τελετὴν ἀγίαν πολυποίκιλον ὀργιοφάνταις.

Translation by A. N. Athanassakis<sup>203</sup>

To Protogonos (incense – myrrh)

Upon two-nature, great and ether-tossed Protogonos I call;  
born of the egg, delighting in his golden wings,  
he bellows like a bull, this begetter of blessed gods and mortal men.  
Erikepaios, seed unforgettable, attended by many rites,  
ineffable, hidden, brilliant scion, whose motion is whirring,  
you scattered the dark mist that lay before you eyes  
and, flapping your wings, you whirled about, and throughout this world  
you brought pure light. For this I call you Phanes  
and Lord Priapos and bright-eyed Antauges<sup>204</sup>.  
But O blessed one of many counsels and seeds, come gladly  
to the celebrants of this holy and elaborate rite.

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<sup>203</sup> Athanassakis 1977, 11.

<sup>204</sup> “The One Reflecting Light.” Ibid., 114.

<Διονύσου>, θυμίαμα στύρακα.

Κικλήσκω Διόνυσον ἐρίβρομον, εὐαστήρα,  
πρωτόγονον, διφυῆ, τρίγονον, Βακχεῖον ἄνακτα,  
ἄγριον, ἄρρητον, κρύφιον, δικέρωτα, δίμορφον,  
κισσόβρονον, ταυρωπόν, Ἀρήιον, εὖιον, ἀγνόν,  
ὠμάδιον, τριετῆ, βοτρυηφόρον, ἐρνεσίπεπλον.  
Εὐβουλεῦ, πολύβουλε, Διὸς καὶ Περσεφονείης  
ἄρρητοις λέκτροισι τεκνωθεῖς, ἄμβροτε δαῖμον·  
κλῦθι, μάκαρ, φωνῆς, ἠδὺς δ' ἐπίπνευσον ἀμεμ[φ]ῆς  
εὐμενὲς ἦτορ ἔχων, σὺν εὐζώνοισι τιθήναις.

Translation by A. N. Athanassakis<sup>205</sup>

To Dionysus (incense – storax)

I call upon loud-roaring and reveling Dionysus,  
primeval, two-natured, thrice-born, Bacchic lord,  
savage, ineffable, secretive, two-horned and two-shaped.  
Ivy-covered, bull-face, warlike, howling, pure,  
you take raw flesh, you have triennial feasts, wrapt in foliage, decked with  
grape clusters.

Resourceful Eubouleus, immortal god sired by Zeus  
when he mated with Persephone in unspeakable union.

Hearken to my voice, O blessed one, and with your fair-girdled nurses

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 43.

breathe on me in a spirit of perfect kindness.

Table 2: Timeline of Ancient History

<b>Greece</b>	<b>Near East</b>	<b>India</b>
	Sumerian Empire (5300-2000) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trade with India</li> </ul>	
		Indus Valley Civilizations (3300-1700)
Minoans (2700-1450) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linear A</li> </ul>	Akkadian Empire (2350-2193)	
Mycenaeans (1600-1100) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linear B</li> </ul>	Old Babylonian Period (2000-1595) Old Assyrian Period (2000-1500) Middle Assyrian Period (1500-1000)	Vedic Period (1500-500) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Rig Veda</i> composed</li> </ul>
Dark Ages (1100-800)		
Archaic Period (800-490) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orientalization</li> <li>• Adoption of Phoenician alphabet</li> </ul>	Neo-Assyrian Period (911-612) Neo-Babylonia Period (612-539) Achaemenid Empire (550-330)	
Classical Period (490-323) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bone Tablets from Olbia</li> <li>• Derveni papyrus written</li> </ul>		
Hellenistic Period (323-146)	Hellenistic Persia (330-250)	

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