

THE MUSIC OF ORPHEUS

Jim Larson, II^o

presented at Washington College, 12 October 2002

The English poet William Congreve in 1697 gave us,

Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast

To soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak.

The marvelous powers of Orpheus playing his lyre to control humans and animals, and even to make the trees to move and the mountains to bow down, were widely told and sung. The many ancient pictures of Orpheus we have generally show him surrounded by an assemblage of animals – lions, sheep, etc., all peacefully listening to his music. “The lion shall lie down with the lamb.” Over several millenia many authors, artists and musicians have been fascinated by the legends of Orpheus.

You can see the power of Orpheus’ music, but this survey will cover more than just his music. It will also familiarize you with the life and legends of Orpheus, the doctrines attributed to him, including the new concepts of the soul, and as we go along, how some portion of these traditions may have influenced Masonry.

Did Orpheus actually exist? Unfortunately we can give no definite answer to this. He does have many characteristics of a fairy-tale or folklore figure. But we often find that legendary figures have at least *some* basis in fact. If Orpheus actually did live, it would have been around 1200 B.C., that is, before the Trojan War. However the doctrines bearing his name developed 600 years later, in the 6th century B.C. in Greece.

Orpheus was supposedly from Thrace, the region just west of the Bosphorus, which nowadays is the European portion of Turkey, southern Bulgaria, and northeast Greece. The Thracians had a language and culture related to the Greeks to their southwest, but were even more closely related to the Phrygians (and presumably the nearby Trojans) to the east on the Asian side of the Bosphorus, in what is now Turkey. Orpheus is usually represented wearing a wreath of bay leaves and playing his seven-stringed lyre, but sometimes wearing a soft, conical cap where the tip curves over

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conical cap where the tip curves over similar to a Phrygian cap (Knights Kadosh note that this is the ancestor of the "liberty cap").

From Thrace came the cult of Dionysos, the wine god and god of creative nature. The original worship of Dionysos was primeval and savage, inducing a kind of madness and frenzy. He was celebrated in night ceremonies by torchlight on mountaintops while wild music was played on drums and flutes. The manic worshippers of Dionysos were often women, called "Maenads" who danced in wild abandon, until in their ecstasies they thought they saw the god himself or his sacred animals. Any unfortunate animal they actually came upon would be overpowered, torn to pieces, and devoured.

The later Orphic writings and mysteries were also associated with the worship of Dionysos. But Orpheus was said to worship the Hyperborean Apollo, and in the legends he shows a peaceful, calm character more akin to the sunny, open air, rational religion of Apollo than to the irrational, orgiastic Dionysos rites of Thrace. Apollo was a god of healing and light, and prophecy. He was a god of music and, like his devotee Orpheus, also played the lyre. Orpheus may have been in the position of being a mediator between the cults of the two gods, attempting to balance and harmonize them in some way. The legends lead us to believe that perhaps Orpheus tried to reform, probably successfully, the original wild Dionysian religion. He is credited by one source as being the man who eradicated the practices of human sacrifice and cannibalism, and certainly, the later Orphic practices frowned on meat-eating and blood sacrifices.

Orpheus was considered a "hero" in classical times, not because he was a great warrior, but because he supposedly lived in the earlier Greek "heroic age" (the period before the Trojan War, no later than 1200 B.C.) and was a participant in some of the heroic legends of that time (but written down centuries later). Like many other Greek "heroes", he was revered highly, but he was not deified or considered a god. His role in the heroic tales was as a musician and magician, associated with spells and incantations. Among the mountains of Thrace there were supposed to be tablets bearing his writings, almost like the sacred stone tablets were familiar with from Mount Sinai. The dramatist Euripides wrote of an unfortunate lack of "such charm on Thracian tablets which tuneful Orpheus carved out". He appears in the tales of Jason and the Argonauts, as part of that group that voyaged on the adventures to obtain the Golden Fleece. In one version he calmed a stormy sea, and in another he called down sleep on the dragon which guarded the Fleece. He also performed most of the religious rites and sacrifices for the group. In the adventure of "The Golden Fleece" as retold in *Tanglewood Tales*, Nathaniel Hawthorne says, Orpheus, the very best of harpers, who sang and played upon his lyre so sweetly, that the brute beasts stood upon their hind legs, and capered merrily to the music. Yes, and at some of his more moving tunes, the rocks bestirred their moss-grown bulk out of the ground, and a grove of forest trees uprooted themselves, and, nodding their tops to one another, performed a country dance.

and, when they couldnt get the adventurers ship, the Argo, down to the water: Jason . . . said, "seat yourselves, and handle your oars, and let Orpheus play upon his harp." Immediately the fifty heroes got on board, and seizing their oars, held them perpendicularly in the air, while Orpheus (who liked such a task far better than rowing) swept his fingers across the harp. At the first ringing note of the music, they felt the vessel stir. Orpheus thrummed away briskly, and the galley slid at once into the sea, dipping her prow so deeply that the figure-head drank the wave with its marvelous lips, and rising again as buoyant as a swan. The rowers plied their fifty oars; the white foam boiled up before the prow; the water gurgled and bubbled in their wake; while Orpheus continued to play so lively a strain of music, that the vessel seemed to dance over the billows by way of keeping time to it. Thus triumphantly did the Argo sail out of the harbor.

We can see were definitely in the realm of folklore here! Let us see what the ancient Greek writer Diodoros said about Orpheus: "He was the first person in memory known to practice music and poetry, and his astonishing poetry had a wonderful melodious quality. It was believed that he could move the animals and the trees with his song. He studied much and learned the myths which were associated with religion, then went to Egypt where he learned a lot more and so became the foremost of the Greeks in theology, ceremonies, music and

poetry." According to Plato and Aristophanes, Orpheus was the first to reveal to men the meaning of rites of initiation (*teletai*).

I find it suggestive that Orpheus, like the later Pythagoras, was supposed to have gone to Egypt for instruction. One of the most interesting things about Egypt from our Rosicrucian standpoint is that it is the land of *kem*, the "black earth", from which came the art of *alchemy*. The earliest surviving western alchemical texts are from the early Christian era, but do have some features characteristic of the religious writings of ancient Egypt. Were any of the so-called "Hermetic" type of teachings available when early figures like Orpheus or Pythagoras may have visited Egypt? We simply don't know.

Many of us have heard for years of the "mysteries of Orpheus and Musaeus" mentioned in passing in the degree of Perfect Elu Mason. Musaios, whose very name denotes music, was supposedly the son or disciple of Orpheus, and is credited by one source with inventing the hexameter in poetry. None of his writings survive however, and he is now considered more or less just as an alter ego of Orpheus.

Now we come to the sadder parts of the story of Orpheus. I will quote from the version of Orpheus and Eurydice (his wife) as told by Thomas Bullfinch in *The Age of Fable* (1855): Eurydice, shortly after her marriage, while wandering with the nymphs, her companions (and sisters), was seen by the shepherd Aristaeus, who was struck by her beauty and made advances to her. She fled, and in fleeing trod upon a snake in the grass, was bitten in the foot and died.

Orpheus sang his grief to all who breathed the upper air, both gods and men, and finding it all unavailing resolved to seek his wife in the regions of the dead. He descended by a cave situated on the side of the promontory of Taenarus and arrived at the Stygian realm. He passed through crowds and ghosts and presented himself before the throne of Pluto and Proserpine.

Accompanying the words with the lyre, he sung, "O deities of the underworld, to whom all we who live must come, hear my words, for they are true. I come not to spy out the secrets of Tartarus, nor to try my strength against Cerberus, the three-headed dog with snaky hair who guards the entrance. I come to seek my wife, whose opening years the poisonous viper's fang has brought to an untimely end. Love has led me here, Love, a god all powerful with us who dwell on the earth, and, if old traditions say true, not less so here. I implore you by these abodes full of terror, these realms of silence and uncreated things, unite again the thread of Eurydice's life. We all are destined to you, and sooner or later must pass to your domain. She too, when she shall have filled her term of life, will rightly be yours. But 'til then grant her to me, I beseech you. If you deny one, I cannot return alone; you shall triumph in the death of us both."

As he sang these tender strains, the very ghosts shed tears.

The Titans and others who were imprisoned in Hades paused amid their torments to hear: Tantalus, in spite of his thirst, stopped for a moment his efforts for water; . . . the vulture ceased to tear the giant's liver; the daughters of Danaus rested from their task of drawing water in a sieve; and Sisyphus sat on his rock to listen. Then for the first time, it is said, the cheeks of the Furies were wet with tears. Proserpine could not resist, and Pluto himself gave way.

Eurydice was called. She came from among the newly-arrived ghosts, limping with her wounded foot. Orpheus was permitted to take her away with him on one condition, that he should not turn around to look at her 'til they should have reached the upper air. Under this condition they proceeded on their way, he leading, she following, through passages dark and steep, in total silence, 'til they had nearly reached the outlet into the cheerful upper world, when Orpheus, in a moment of forgetfulness, to assure himself that she was still following, cast a glance behind him, when instantly she was borne away.

Stretching out their arms to embrace each other, they grasped only the air! Dying now a second time, she yet cannot reproach her husband, for how can she blame his impatience to behold her? "Farewell," she said, "a last farewell," -- and was hurried away, so fast that the sound hardly reached his ears.

Orpheus endeavoured to follow her, and besought permission to return and try once more for her release, but the stern ferryman Charon repulsed him and refused passage. Seven days he lingered about the brink, without food or sleep; then bitterly accusing of cruelty the powers of Erebus, he sang his complaints to the rocks and mountains, melting the hearts of

tigers and moving the oaks from their stations.

This moving story has affected many poets since, including Milton, who wrote in 1632:
Or bid the soul of Orpheus sing
Such notes as, warbled to the string,
Drew iron tears down Plutos cheek.

But let us return to Bullfinch and continue, and we will now hear the tale of the death of Orpheus:

He held himself aloof from womankind, dwelling constantly on the recollection of his sad mischance. The Thracian maidens tried their best to captivate him, but he repulsed their advances. They bore with him as long as they could; but finding him insensible one day, excited by the rites of the Bacchus, one of them exclaimed, "See yonder our despiser!" and threw at him her javelin. The weapon, as soon as it came within the sound of his lyre, fell harmless at his feet. So did the stones that they threw at him. But the women raised a scream and downed the voice of the music, and then the missiles reached him and soon were stained with his blood. The maniacs tore him limb from limb and threw his head and his lyre into the river Hebrus, down which they floated, murmuring sad music, to which the shores responded a plaintive symphony. The Muses gathered up the fragments of his body and buried them at Libethra, where the nightingale is said to sing over his grave more sweetly than in any other part of Greece. His lyre was placed by Jupiter among the stars.

The only comment I need to make on this tale is, that the folklore element is very strong. From various versions we hear that the trees shed their leaves, the animals and rivers wept, and the head of Orpheus which floated down the river, singing as it went, drifted across the Aegean Sea to the island of Lesbos off the coast of Anatolia, where it was buried in a shrine, and subsequently was famous for giving oracles.

The reasons for the death of Orpheus are variously given in the different sources. The version above seems to be kind of a battle of the sexes where Orpheus didnt give the Thracian women the attention they desired, but also we must remember that if the Maenads were in a crazed frenzy they probably would have killed any living thing in their path. It is possible also that he was killed for being a devotee of Apollo in Thrace, the stronghold of Dionysos. But the most likely explanation is that he was trying to convert the old, wild religion of Dionysos to a more calm and rational religion like that of Apollo and lost his life for it. We can understand that, if he was trying to make changes in the popular religion, he probably met the fate of so many religious reformers throughout history.

In the tale of the death of Orpheus, we find ourselves in a strange world a world where barbaric practices of human sacrifice, dismemberment, and cannibalism occurred. I think there can be no doubt that such practices actually took place in the "heroic age" (1200 B.C and before) of Greece this was the state of affairs before Orpheus, or his followers, purified and reformed religion.

However I mean to show also that some of these horrifying events may have occurred only in dreams or ecstatic visions. Scholars since the 1950s have generally inclined to the view that Orpheus and other magical figures of ancient Greece were shamans or influenced by shamanism coming from Asia by way of Thrace. Shamanism (the word comes from the Tungusic language of central Siberia) is a phenomenon we know has existed (and still exists) among tribal cultures throughout the world, such as the American and Australian aborigines. Studies of it in central Asia and Siberia (the closest present occurrence of it to Greece) show remarkable traits. Practically all rites of initiation worldwide have symbolism of death and rebirth, but shamanism differs in several noteworthy respects. The shaman, probably affected by isolation, fasting and possibly by drugs, goes into a trance state and has solitary hallucinatory visions where he experiences death and rebirth in extraordinary ways, including being torn apart and devoured, his flesh scraped off down to the white bone. Sometimes his limbs are boiled in a cauldron. Other times he is dismembered as his head sits aside, watching. Afterwards his bones are put back together and new flesh grows back.

The shaman is also considered a unique individual in the tribe instead of a representative of a group. After his experience he will be the bearer of qualities others lack, such as the power

to heal, and will bring secret knowledge back from the other domains of his visions. In his visions he often travels to the underworld below, and sometimes to the heavens above. This reminds us of traveling to "the infernal regions as described by Dante", and the further pilgrimages of Dante, ending in Paradise. Now, remembering Orpheus and his trip to the Underworld, I think we can see some parallels. I think Knights Rose Croix have seen something familiar here and how as Knights of the Eagle: "his wings bear him above the clouds, into the purer atmosphere and nearer to the source of Light, and with that light his eyes are not dazzled."

Modern scholars believe that shamanism traveled from the nomadic and warlike people of Scythia, north of the Black Sea, down through Thrace to Greece. In addition to Orpheus and Musaeus, many "wonder-workers" appeared in Greece before the Classical Age: the magicians Epimenides, Bacis, & Chalcis, all of whom gave oracles; the spirit-traveler Aristaeus, who also wrote of the strange peoples living north of Scythia on the way to Hyperborea (which means "beyond the North wind"); the legendary Abaris from Hyperborea who arrived supposedly "riding on an arrow" (surely a shamanic way to travel); the philosophers and sages Linus (another musician), Pherecydes, and of course the great Pythagoras, who was himself a devotee of Orpheus. Practically all of these showed some influence of shamanism.

By the 6th century B.C. we find our first hints of the new Orphic doctrines in Greece. This is why scholars used to think there were several people named Orpheus, to account for the Orpheus of the heroic age (c.1200 B.C.) and also one or more who introduced the Orphic system, probably in the 6th century B.C. Many scholars feel that at this time whatever remained of poems ascribed to Orpheus and Musaeus were "added to", and that these additions were the new Orphic stories of the beginning of the world, which showed the influence of Eastern doctrines new to Greece, as well as shamanic elements. These appeared in the Orphic Poems or Theogonies. Theogony means "origin of the gods", and these lays or poems dealt with the creation of the universe and the nature of the human soul. None of the Orphic Poems or Theogonies survive in their entirety; we know of them only from fragments quoted by later authors. However scholars feel that these poems, which feature creation by separation and division, and which have some rather crude and primitive content, show evidence of origin in the 6th century B.C. or earlier.

There are various versions of the poems, but we will examine the most well-known, the "Rhapsodic Theogony", the most fully-developed one, probably not written down till the 1st century B.C., but containing the elements of the older ones. "Rhapsody" means something enthusiastic and even ecstatic, and hopefully we will catch a wee bit of this spirit as we examine the story of the creation of the universe and the gods. It is somewhat different from the standard ancient Greek version of the creation we are familiar with from Hesiod.

In this version, the first of all beings was *Chronos*, Unaging Time. The name *Chronos* resembles the name *Kronos* (Saturn) who appeared several generations later in the Theogonies. But *Chronos* is Unending Time whereas *Kronos* is Time manifested in human experience (the familiar figure with the scythe). *Chronos* was represented as a winged serpent, as was the *Zrvan* of the Persians (called by the Greeks *Aion*). The resemblances are quite detailed and we can be sure that this Time was an *Oriental* dragon.

Chronos first generated moist *Aether*, the divine substance which later filled the outer regions of Heaven; and Chaos, a great chasm (the creation of *space*). Once physical space was in existence, *Chronos* began to fashion an enormous, shining Egg. In some versions this egg was laid by the goddess Night, but in this version it was the progeny of *Aether* and Chaos (Chasm). Heres a description from a later writer: "In the course of eternity the outer parts of Chaos became denser and thus the sides and ends were made, so it assumed the fashion and form of a gigantic egg". At any rate, this is the World-Egg from which came all future things in the universe. The idea of the Cosmic Egg is probably from Iran and India. It is found as far East as Siberia, and is thought to be another evidence that part of the Orphic doctrines came from the East. Now the later dramatist Aristophanes said that the Egg was "borne or carried on the wind" He was trying to be humorous and relate it to a so-called "wind-egg" which is sterile. However the idea that the Egg was brought on the winds was taken up seriously into the Orphic doctrines because the soul or life-principle was considered to be Air

or similar in substance to Air, and, as later stated by Aristotle, the soul "comes into us from space as we breathe, borne by the winds." Thus the Egg, the first creation in the universe, was impregnated in itself by the divine spirit which seized upon it, and resolved itself into manifestation. So now we finally know the answer to the great riddle, "which came first, the chicken or the egg?"

The Cosmic Egg is sometimes identified with the *Krater*, or Mixing-bowl later mentioned by Plato and the Hermetic writings. The *Krater* in Plato was a place where souls were mixed into bodies, and one of the earliest alchemical writings mentioned a *Krater*. There was an Orphic writing called *The Krater* also. We'd love to get a look at it I'm sure, but unfortunately it no longer survives.

The egg was broken by stirrings within, or by the squeezing of the serpent, Time, and Phanes or Eros (Love) emerges. He was a wondrously beautiful youth with golden wings. Four animal heads appeared on his body (around his chest): a ram, bull, lion and serpent. It was said he "shone forth and gave light to creation". Phanes was also called Protogonos ("the first-born of the gods"). Phanes was the creator of the world, who originated the physical universe. Phanes means "one who is (or makes) manifest". This name, and some of the other epithets applied to him, are thought to be Phrygian, and so, like the Egg, came from the East. He was described as hermaphroditic since he created all things by himself, but also was said to have mated with the goddess Night, who bore him the children *Ouranos* (Heaven) and *Gaia* (Earth), who in turn gave birth to the Titans, Kronos and his giant brothers. The genealogy of the gods from this point follows the common Greek version of Hesiod, so I won't repeat it.

Before going on, I will note that mentions of Phanes and the World-egg occur in some rather strange degrees of various Masonic and pseudo-Masonic systems, such as the so called Egyptian Rite of Memphis, now defunct, whose grand seal depicted a winged egg. This Rite now only exists within the Grand College of Rites and is no longer practiced.

To continue the Theogony, the generation after the Titans was Zeus and the Olympian gods. When they came into power Zeus, as the chief god, *swallowed* Phanes and the entire world and then created the universe anew. Now we get to the central mystery of this story. Here Dionysos was a child, the son and heir to Zeus, who placed Dionysos on the throne of the Universe. The tale now deals with sufferings of Dionysos. The Titans were jealous of the child Dionysos. They approached him with their faces whitened with gypsum dust as a disguise, and twirling bull-roarers. (Note that Australian aborigines and other tribal peoples also paint their faces white, to simulate bone and make them appear as skeletons, and whirl bullroarers during their initiation ceremonies). The Titans distracted the child's attention with toys and playthings: a mirror, cone (spinning top), ball, knucklebones, puppets, and apples, in order to seize him. These objects were later considered "tokens of the sacrament" in the religion of Dionysos as reformed by the followers of Orpheus. The ruffians then tore Dionysos to pieces, cooked, and ate him (the dismemberment theme from the old Dionysos worship and also sounding like a shamanic vision). But in this Orphic version the view of the dismemberment and devouring had changed and they were at this point considered, as they would be today, horrendous crimes.

Dionysos was resurrected, like so many other dying gods of antiquity: the goddess Athena saved his heart, still beating, put it in a casket and took it to Zeus, who made an image of Dionysos out of gypsum, and placed the heart into it, thus magically restoring him to life.

It has been suggested that the death of the child Dionysos was depicted in night ceremonies with charades acted out by gypsum-painted participants with their bull-roarers and other sacramental objects around a terrified candidate representing Dionysos who underwent a symbolic death and resurrection. Possibly an animal was substituted and actually sacrificed at the point of the candidate's so-called death. Then perhaps the animal's body was cut or torn apart and the still-bleeding heart was inserted into a gypsum image. During a moment of blackness the candidate would have been substituted in place of the image and probably then stood up, illuminated by rekindled light, as reborn.

Let us return now to the Theogony. For the murder of Dionysos. Zeus blasted the Titans to

ashes with his thunderbolt. From their ashes, or soot, he created mortal man, our first ancestors. Thus we all are made mainly out of the substance of the evil Titans, and hence tend to be wicked by nature. But we therefore also have within us a tiny portion of the Dionysos which the Titans devoured. Thus we each carry a small spark of the Divine with us, inside us. This is the origin of this inspiring idea. We see here how a rather crude legend has given rise to one of the most sublime esoteric concepts, which eventually made its way to the Master of the Royal Secret and other degrees of Scottish Rite Masonry.

Before leaving the subject of Dionysos, I would like to mention that the learned German Masons of a century ago, in their theories of the origin of Masonry, tried to trace it back to the Dionysian Artificers, a guild of workmen of the Roman Empire. We believe now that the evidence is insufficient, but the idea of a possible connection with Dionysos is an intriguing idea nevertheless.

Now let us turn our attention to the Orphic concept of the nature of mankind and the human soul. The original conception from the heroic age of Greece was, that death was essentially the end of identity. There had been belief in an afterlife in Egypt. From the legends of Orpheus, we could consider that he might have brought it to Greece from Egypt. But as far as we know, in heroic Greece, which had a very different climate and culture from Egypt, the material body was thought to be basically all there was. The poet Homer did mention something called the *Psyche*, but it was a thin, insubstantial thing that only appeared at the moment of death, and then would go "gibbering down" to the underworld, which was a dry, dusty place, somewhat like the *Sheol* of the ancient Hebrews. In Greece during the heroic age, like in ancient Israel, the people projected their identity into their group. There was a collective identity and piety, so some scholars say that perhaps the idea of personal immortality was unnecessary.

A change took place when shamanic influence entered Greece (6th century B.C. or earlier). Shamans experienced *Ecstasy* in a technical sense the word means "to stand outside oneself". As said earlier, the experience of the shaman was that of traveling apart from his body. We know that certain individuals today have near-death experiences or other out-of-body experiences (usually caused by a profound shock to their system), which can be similar to the experience of shamans. The so-called astral projection which may be done by those with psychic talents, is a similar phenomenon. The experience of the shaman outside his body became a template for the beginning of an inner identity separate from the human body. Some scholars feel that when this came to Greece it was, at least for Europe, the *origin of the concept of the human soul*. In the original tribal communities where shamanism developed, this soul was a non-material essence possessed by the shaman that other people didn't have. But when shamanic influence reached Greece, it was democratized so that a wider circle of people could possess this essence, or soul. This took place in the Mysteries. In the Mysteries, the initiate was blessed with a positive distinction: he could expect a happy afterlife. This caused a whole new orientation about death. The anxiety about death was lessened or even dispelled by his knowledge that he had an individual immaterial identity he carried along with his physical body. This dualism, or belief in a soul in addition to the body, was new to Greece.

The exposure of a large group of people to this idea of their own separate soul is thought by scholars to have first taken place in the Eleusinian Mysteries, near Athens, no later than the 8th century B.C. Now all initiates (there were both men and women) were the "designated individual" of the community, like the shaman. Time prevents consideration of the Eleusinian Mysteries here. But it needs to be noted that only citizens of the Athenian state were permitted to be initiated. In later centuries, foreign dignitaries were granted honorary citizenship to qualify them for initiation. This is similar to ancient Israel, where only members of the Twelve Tribes were allowed access to the mysteries of Israel (and only the Tribe of Levites were allowed to be priests). In other words, one had to be born into the tribe, or in the case of Greece, the city-state, in order to partake of the sacred mysteries.

This went on for several centuries, until something revolutionary happened in the 6th century B.C.: the Orphic Mysteries appeared in Greece, which were opened to *all* who were willing to try to comply with the doctrines accompanying them. This was the first step toward

a belief in the brotherhood of mankind, and the qualifying of all for personal immortality, not just those within the Athenian city-state. For this reason, it was considered *subversive* by the established authorities as being a threat to their collective community. Orphism became a counter-culture in Greece. They soon became a strong minority, but never came into the majority. What were the Orphic Mysteries? A striking feature of Orphism was that it was a considered a "mass of books" and some scholars have even doubted that there was any kind of a sacred drama. But Orpheus was considered as "the revealer of *teletai* (the Mysteries)" and supposedly had a connection even with the Eleusinian Mysteries. There are reasons to believe that the Orphic Mysteries were themselves presented in dramatic form, as I spoke of earlier, in various unknown locations in Greece.

But the writings were very important and required study by the initiates, as embodying the teachings and philosophy of the cult. In addition to the stories of the theogony, and the death of Dionysos, as told earlier, the Orphic philosophy taught the doctrine of metempsychosis or reincarnation. This doctrine came from the East, probably from India, where it appears in the Upanishads (7th century B.C.). At death, the soul leaves and is washed in the waters of forgetfulness in Hades, then enters the body of another new-born human or animal. This doctrine is interpreted as follows from the story of the death of Dionysos: all humans are a mixture of a Dionysos part, which is immortal, beautiful and wise, inside the Titanic nature, which is mortal, violent and deceitful. Thus arose the Orphic doctrine of *soma sema* mentioned by Plato, which means, "the body is the prison-house of the soul". From this they came to the belief that the source of evil lay in the body with its appetites and passions, and they recommended an ascetic life to avoid sin and pollution. In order to purge the Titan part out of their life and out of past lives they practiced catharsis through abstinence and self-discipline. The Orphic purification of the rites of Dionysos replaced the old drunken frenzies with rites of purification and spiritual *enthousiasmos*, which means "to have a god within". The Orphic believers abstained from animal sacrifice, and were of course vegetarians, because they believed that any animal could be carrying the soul of one who had been a human in a previous incarnation.

Their objective in catharsis was to escape "the sorrowful weary wheel" (the cycle of rebirths). The wheel was a symbol used in actual temples and in pictures of Hades. The goal was for the soul to finally travel up to the region of the "Aither" or Heaven, and return to the proper star from which it originated, where it would "live a blessed life according to its true nature".

They had a number of strange taboos, such as against eating beans. They wore white clothing and avoided pollution by birth and death, by staying away from the vicinity of childbirth or dead bodies. The unrighteous were thought to be destined to be plunged into filth and mud in Hades, and condemned to carry water to fill a leaky jar, which can never be filled. Gold tablets have been found by archaeologists in the graves of Orphic believers which gave instructions for finding the desirable places in Hades for purification and redemption. This reminds us that Orpheus was supposed to be a great magician, and leads us to consider that there was a disreputable side of Orphism also, wandering soothsayers and charlatans who sold "binding spells" for money, which gave the movement a black eye.

Orphism did have a lot of influence on later systems in Greece. Pythagoras revered Orpheus and his system adopted the dualism, transmigration of souls, purification through *catharsis*, and even the abstinence from meat and beans of Orphism. But his deity was Apollo rather than Dionysos, and his rational, mathematical thought developed the theory and practice of music in an entirely new direction. The philosopher Empedocles held firmly to Orphic doctrine, though he also originated his own theory of natural philosophy. And the great philosopher Plato made use of the Orphic myths and had great interest and respect, in fact a near-reverence for Orphic doctrines. He propounded his theory of the Ideas, which in some respects was a natural development of Orphic philosophy, and was combined with it by later authors.

In later centuries, in the more cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Hellenistic and Roman Empires, the tendency in philosophy was toward syncretism, the combination of different systems into conglomerate beliefs. In the early centuries of the Christian era, we see the appearance of the Neo-pythagoreans, the Neoplatonists, the Hermetic writings, and the

appearance of the two pythagoreans, the Neoplatonists, the Hermetic writings, and the Chaldean Oracles, all of which show this tendency toward combination of prior doctrines into more complex systems. Some of the Orphic doctrines found their way into the foregoing systems; along with many doctrines that were not, but became labeled as "Orphic". I'm not criticizing these writings, many of which carry the most beautiful teachings. But part of my purpose in this paper, following the lead of the pre-eminent scholar of Orphism, Prof. Guthrie, has been to try to isolate the characteristics of the Orphic system from other systems with which it has been confused. The "Orphic Hymns" (not the same as the Orphic Poems mentioned earlier) were written in Asia Minor around 200 A.D., probably by a mystic cult society. They are addressed to many gods, and some scholars feel they are too catholic and universal to be strictly Orphic. But some are very beautiful and inspiring.

During the Christian era paintings of Orpheus in the catacombs under Rome seem to show a transition from gatherings of all the animals, to gatherings of sheep only listening to the music, then to representations of the Good Shepherd and his sheep, the central figure no longer playing a lyre, but carrying a lamb. There is even an amulet of the 3rd century A.D. showing a crucified Orpheus! There were certainly many instances in antiquity of a "son of god sacrificed" as the stories of Dionysos and others show. But there are however great differences in the Christian story. Christ was a *voluntary* self-sacrifice in contrast to the pagan gods. And most importantly, there was a positive ethic required of the Christian, whereas the Orphic was mainly required to observe certain negative rules such as abstinence from meat-eating.

Moving into later times, we find that the legend of Orpheus and his music, especially his trip to the underworld, continued through the middle ages to recent times. In the 14th century poem, the "Lay of Sir Orfeo", he goes to a beautiful castle in "Fairyland", which we find at one point to be the abode of the dead: full of the beheaded, the strangled, the drowned, and those who were supposedly taken away by the "fairies" in their sleep! There was an opera by Gluck in the 18th century called "Orpheus and Eurydice", and our beloved Brother Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, in his Masonic-inspired opera, "The Magic Flute", has Prince Tamino play the magic flute, enticing the wild beasts to come and hear, clearly reminiscent of Orpheus. A century later we had the operetta, "Orpheus in the Underworld" by Offenbach, which has a beautiful and familiar theme which recurs throughout. In modern times there have been a number of films among them are one by Cocteau in the 1930s which was however a bit too symbolic, and hard to understand, for my taste. There is a marvelous film from 1959, "Black Orpheus" which takes place among the Black people of Rio de Janeiro during Carnival, in which Orpheus loses Eurydice, and makes a pilgrimage in search of her, which includes a visit to voodoo ceremonies. There is a continuous samba beat during most of the movie and some memorable scenes.

The story of Orpheus still survives as a vital and inspiring story, and many of the doctrines which bear his name remain with us. Orpheus, or whoever reformed the old Dionysian religion, had a wondrous effect, and we need not be ashamed if something of these doctrines survived into our present-day Masonic ritual and beliefs. In particular, the opening of the mysteries worldwide beyond local or tribal boundaries, and the qualification of all who joined the brotherhood to learn about the new promise of eternal life, is I believe the true Music of Orpheus which has come down to us. The teachings about the soul thus disseminated, reminds us of our Masonic teachings about that part of us that "bears the nearest resemblance or affinity to that Supreme Intelligence which pervades all nature, and which will never, never, never die".

In closing, I need to give credit to two sources in particular before I ask for questions. "Orpheus and Greek Religion" by the late Prof. Guthrie, though first written in 1935, is still *the* book on Orpheus and Orphism. It is so well-written and cautious in its conclusions that it remains first-rate scholarship as well as fascinating reading, though it needs to be supplemented by the material on shamanism. I had wanted to read this book for years, and had finally acquired a copy, but it had been sitting on my "to-read" pile for about a year, when I attended a series of lectures on the Mysteries by Prof. David Ulansey and others of the California Institute of Integral Studies, at Madouri, Greece, this last June. Dr. Ulansey's lectures updated my knowledge of shamanism and made the connection to the mysteries which started the spark that kindled my fire of interest in this subject! I hope you have found it

of interest also. Thank you.

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