

## MYSTERY CULTS AND INCANTATIONS

### Evidence for Orphic Charms in Euripides' *Cyclops* 646–48?

The close connection between initiation into a mystery cult and acquisition of a special kind of post-mortem comfort or status has been thoroughly discussed by modern scholars, but in recent years this discussion has shifted to include the non-eschatological benefits that initiation was also thought to confer. Walter Burkert, for example, has stressed how some initiates claim to be protected in times of physical danger in this world, as well as in the next. His two clearest examples are Samothracian initiates, who were thought to enjoy special immunity from shipwreck and storms at sea, and Mithraic initiates, who were believed to have a similar advantage on the battlefield.<sup>1</sup> I shall argue that a neglected passage from a Euripidean satyr-play reflects a similar tradition connected with Orphic-Dionysiac initiations. In the *Cyclops*, a play set on the island of Sicily, the chorus of satyrs, who strongly identify themselves as devotees of Dionysus, claim to know an incantation of Orpheus that will bring down a form of fiery destruction upon their enemy – in this case the eponymous ogre of the play. As we shall see, some of the language used to describe this spell echoes that used in traditional hexametrical incantations of the fifth-century. In their boast about the power of this Orphic spell, more-over, the satyrs diverge from the canonical Homeric version of the *Cyclops*' story in ways that suggest they are recalling a popular Orphic myth about the Titans, who murdered and ate the young Dionysus, and their subsequent punishment at the hands of Zeus. As we shall see, this variation also fits into a wider pattern, in which theogonic or cosmogonic myths are used in protective incantations to recall a primordial moment in history when the forces of order, in this case Zeus, triumph over the forces of destruction and havoc. The satyrs' boast about their Orphic charm, then, provides good evidence for both the linguistic form and the narrative content of Orphic incantations that were in use in ancient Athens in the fifth century.

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1) W. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge 1987) 18–20.

*Section 1: Some Preliminaries*

Before I begin, I wish to lay some groundwork for my argument by addressing two issues that might lead to prejudice against it: (i) the likelihood that a satyr play like the *Cyclops* would allude to a serious Orphic poem or practice; and (ii) the likelihood that Orphic poetry could be used to protect a living person from bodily harm or death. To address the first issue, let me make the general point that comedy is often an excellent place to find evidence for serious religious and magical beliefs and practices.<sup>2</sup> The song of the Eleusinian initiates danced and sung at Aristophanes, *Frogs* 324–414, for example, is often used as important evidence for reconstructing the Eleusinian mysteries, and a joke in his *Plutos* about a special ring designed to keep the sycophants away clearly parodies a formula found on later Greek amulets designed to protect against scorpion- or snake-bite (*Plutos* 883–85).<sup>3</sup>

ΔΙ.

οὐδὲν προτιμῶ σου. φορῶ γὰρ πριάμενος  
τὸν δακτύλιον τονδὶ παρ' Εὐδάμου δραχμῆς.

ΚΑ.

ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔνεστι «συκοφάντου δῆγματος».

Just Man: I have no concern for you, for I am wearing this ring purchased from Eudamos for a drachma!

Karion: But it does not have inscribed on it “for the bite of an informer”.

2) See, e. g., J. Mikalson, *Athenian Popular Religion* (Chapel Hill 1983) 10. It is true, of course, that satyr-plays are more concerned with parody of tragedy, but they do share a number of features of old comedy, including obviously anachronistic references to contemporary fifth-century culture. For a general discussion, see D. F. Sutton, *The Greek Satyr Play*, Meisenheim am Glan 1980, 80–81, and for a specific instance, see his discussion of satyrs as panhellenic athletes (29–34). The *Cyclops* itself, of course, mimics contemporary drinking modes, with a κῶμος (495–510), followed by instructions for proper behavior at a symposium (519–75).

3) For discussion see C. Bonner, *Studies in Ancient Amulets* (Ann Arbor 1950) 4–5, and R. Kotansky, *Incantations and Prayers for Salvation on Inscribed Greek Amulets*, in: C. A. Faraone and D. Obbink, eds., *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (Oxford 1991) 110–11. See Antiphon, fr. 177 (Kock) for a ring used to cure an upset stomach.

More to the point is a scene in Aristophanes' *Peace* in which the comic hero Trygaios watches as a character named Polemos ("War") carries a large mortar on to the stage and calls for his henchman Kudoimos ("Battle-Din") to bring him a pestle, with which he will grind up and destroy all of Greece with battles and armed conflicts. In the face of this impending disaster, Trygaios pleads directly with the audience to prevent Kudoimos from returning with the pestle (276–79):<sup>4</sup>

ὦνδρες, τί πεισόμεσθα: νῦν ἀγών μέγας,  
ἀλλ' εἴ τις ὑμῶν ἐν Σαμοθράκη τυγχάνει  
μεμυημένος, νῦν ἐστὶν εὔξασθαι καλὸν  
ἀποστραφῆναι τοῦ μετιόντος τῷ πόδε.

What will we suffer, men? Now is the great conflict! If any of you happens to have been initiated at Samothrace, now's a fine chance for you to pray that the feet of the one who is approaching get twisted back!

Commentators have long suggested that Aristophanes refers here to the popular belief that Samothracian initiates were taught special prayers to ward off shipwreck and death at sea.<sup>5</sup> In a recent article I have shown, in fact, that in this passage Aristophanes echoes the language used in Hellenistic and later Greek amulets, which likewise pray to a god to "twist back" approaching headaches, fevers and even hailstones,<sup>6</sup> as, for example, the expression found on an inscribed gold amulet used to cure ophthalmia: "I pray to you (ἐπεύχομαί σοι), ο great name of Iao: twist back (ἀπόστρεψον) the ophthalmia that is attacking (τὴν ἐπιφερομένην ὀφθαλμίαν)." <sup>7</sup> Verbal parallels in this amulet and others suggest that Aristophanes

4) I give the text and translation of A. H. Sommerstein, *The Comedies of Aristophanes*, vol. 5: *Peace* (Warminster 1985). With one very minor variation (ἀγών instead of ἄγων) all of the commentators mentioned in the next note print the same text.

5) See the comments ad loc. of, e. g.: W. W. Merry, *Aristophanes: Peace* (Oxford 1900); H. Sharpley, *The Peace of Aristophanes* (Edinburgh 1905); J. Van Leeuwen, *Aristophanis Pax* (Lugduni 1906); M. Platnauer, *Aristophanes: Peace* (Oxford 1964); Sommerstein (above, n. 4) and S. D. Olson, *Aristophanes: Peace* (Oxford 1998).

6) C. A. Faraone, *Twisting and Turning in the Prayer of the Samothracian Initiates* (*Aristophanes, Peace* 276–79), *Museum Helveticum* 61 (2004) 187–207.

7) R. Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, vol. 1, *Papyrologica Coloniensia* 22.1 (Opladen 1994) no. 53 (late Roman or early Byzantine).

is echoing the language and strategy of these famous prayers, which were apparently designed to persuade the mysterious Samothracian gods to attack preemptively any force that threatened the initiate or his health.

My second preliminary point is that Orphic poems were also used in the world of the living as practical magical charms to protect people from physical harm or death. In the first place Orpheus is frequently described as a wizard who uses his songs to tame wild animals, move mountains and even charm the adamant hearts of Persephone and Hades. We have clear evidence, moreover, that Euripides knew of this tradition about the magical power of Orphic verses: in his *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, for instance, the elegant final appeal of the doomed heroine begins with a long contrary-to-fact condition that alludes to such incantations (IA 1211–12): “If I, father, by chanting (ἐπάδουσ’) the λόγος of Orpheus, were able to persuade the stones to follow me ...” Note that here the verb is ἐπάδειν, “to incant” rather than the simplex form of the verb “to sing”. In the *Alcestis*, moreover, the chorus laments (962–71): “I myself ... have found nothing stronger than Fate, neither any incantation (φάρμακον) in the Thracian tablets which the Orphic voice (Ὀρφεΐα γῆρυς) inscribed, nor any of the herbal remedies (φάρμακα), however many Apollo shredded and gave to Asclepius for the benefit of much suffering mortals.” Commentators rightly see a contrast in this passage between the incantations of Orpheus and the herbal lore of Asclepius,<sup>8</sup> neither of which are of any use – so the chorus claims – against a fated death. Since Orpheus’ voice is persistently poetical and since nearly all of the poetry attributed to him in antiquity is hexametrical, it requires no great leap of faith to assume that when Euripides describes “the λόγος of Orpheus” or “the φάρμακον” inscribed by “the Orphic voice”, he is thinking of a hexametrical incantation.

As it turns out, there is a growing body of non-literary evidence for the early use of protective hexametrical verses in Sicily, Crete and elsewhere. The “B-Version” of the so-called “Orphic Gold Leaves”, for example, provides special passwords for the dead initiates to use when they descend into the underworld and reach the “guardians” who are to decide their fate in Hades. Although the texts of these tablets show clearly that they were a kind

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8) E. g. A. M. Dale, Euripides. *Alcestis* (Oxford 1954) 121.

of verbal passport to be uttered upon entry to the underworld, in recent years scholars have suggested that these “Gold Leaves” may have also served as amulets that protected people while they were still alive.<sup>9</sup> Two of the earliest B-texts were, for example, found rolled up in graves like amulets, and a third tablet from Petelia, although inscribed in handwriting that dates to the fourth-century BCE, was found sealed in an amulet case dating to the Roman period, suggesting that it was a family heirloom passed down through the generations.<sup>10</sup> The apparent use of these “Orphic” hexameters to protect initiates while they were still alive suggested to Martin West a plausible restoration of two fragmentary verses that appear at the very beginning or end of two of the longest and earliest texts, the fourth-century tablets from Hipponion and Petelia:<sup>11</sup>

Μνημοσύνης τόδε (?)θρίον·<sup>12</sup> ἐπεὶ ἄν μέλλῃσι θανεῖσθαι  
[ἐν πίνακι χρυσέφ] τόδε γρα[ψάτω ἡδὲ φορεῖτω].

This is the (?)leaf of Memory. Whenever he (i.e. the initiate) is about to die, let him write this [on a golden tablet and carry it].

Here we are told that the text is to be inscribed when someone “is about to die”, a phrase that all commentators rightly understand to mean that at this point death is inescapable and the verses on the tablet will be recited in the underworld. But the fact that the final owner of the Petelia tablet seems to have inherited this gold tablet and wore it round his neck in a standard amulet case suggests that he, at least, and presumably his fourth-century BCE ancestors inter-

9) See Kotansky (above, n. 3) 114–15 and idem (above, n. 7) no. 27.

10) A fourth tablet – Kotansky (above, n. 7) no. 27, found at Rome and dating to the second-century CE – was inscribed with a short, hybrid example of the A-Version of the Orphic Leaves and includes, like most traditional amulets, the name of its owner, Caecilia Secundina; it, too, was tightly folded up in a manner that suggests it was sealed in an amulet case.

11) I give the text and translation of R. Janko, *Forgetfulness in the Golden Tablets of Memory*, CQ 34 (1984) 91–92, with the supplements to the second line by M. L. West, *Zum neuen Goldblättchen aus Hipponion*, ZPE 18 (1975) 229–236 ad loc.

12) The tablet has ἐρίον; other suggestions include ἡρίον (tomb) or σρίον (Laconian dialect for θρίον). A related gold tablet – inscribed some seven centuries later for a Roman noblewoman named Caecilia Secundina (see note 10) – reads: Μνημοσύνης τόδε δῶρον, ἀοίδιμον ἀνθρώποισιν. See Janko (above, n. 11) 91–92 and Kotansky (above, n. 7) no. 27, for discussion.

preted the Greek here differently to mean that the verses would protect him whenever it seemed that death was threatening, for example in the form of a serious illness or a difficult situation on a battlefield.<sup>13</sup>

In a magical recipe of the fourth century CE, we find a close parallel for a spell that seems to derive from a mystery cult and is explicitly designed to ward off death. The recipe offers three different protective incantations, the last of which runs as follows (PGM LXX 4–25):

ασκει κατασκει ερων ορειων εωρ μεγα σεμνηρη βασι γ’.

φοβαντία σεμνή· τετέλεσμαι καὶ εἰς μέγαρον κατέβην Δακτύλων καὶ τὰ ἄλλα εἶδον κάτω· παρθένος, κύων, καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ πάντα ... κἄν ἐπὶ θάτατον ἀπάγη, λέγε ταῦτα σκορπίζων σήσαμον, καὶ σώσει σέ.

“*Aski kataski erôn oreôn eôr mega semnyêr bayi* (three times); Holy Phobantia(?). I have been initiated and I went down into the chamber of the Daktyls and I saw the other things below: Virgin, bitch and all the rest.” ... And even if you are led off to death, say these words while scattering sesame seeds and they will save you.

This verbal charm begins with eight apparently incomprehensible words that are referred to in later sources as the famous “Ephesian Letters” (*Ephesia grammata*). These same words are, however, described as “the Orphic λόγος” (τὸν λόγον τὸν Ὀρφαικόν) in a recipe for an elaborate binding spell that is preserved in another magical handbook (PGM VII 451).

Until recently scholars believed the words *aski kataski* were some kind of nonsense formula, like “abracadabra”, but David Jordan has shown that they are, in fact, a severely corrupted version of the first line of an early Greek incantation in hexameters that was apparently well known in Sicily, southern Italy and Crete in the late classical period:<sup>14</sup>

13) Indeed, if the original fourth-century owner of the tablet believed that it was essential for post-mortem salvation, he or she surely would have seen to it that the tablet was buried with them, as is true in most of the other cases. For a similar case of practical amulet as family heirloom, see Kotansky (above, n.7) no.13, the so-called Antaura amulet, which was found in a third-century CE grave, but was inscribed in a late first-century or second-century hand. Designed to combat migraine headaches (a hereditary disease), it seems fairly certain that it was handed down from one family member to another, until the last of line died in a Roman camp in Carnuntum, Austria.

14) Text and translation by D. R. Jordan, *A Love Charm with Verses*, ZPE 72 (1988) 245–59; for most recent discussion, see A. Bernabé, *La Ephesia Grammata: Génesis de una fórmula mágica*, MHNH 3 (2003) 5–28.

ἔσκε κατὰ σκιερῶν ὀρέων μαλαναυγεί χώρῳ  
 Περσεφόνης ἐκ κήπου ἄγει πρὸς ἀμολγὸν ἀνάγκη  
 τὴν τετραβάμονα παῖς ἀγίην Δήμητρος ὀπηδόν  
 αἴγ' ἀκαμαντορόα νασμοῦ θαλεροῖο γάλακτος  
 θεσσόμενον ( )  
 λαμπάδας εἰνοδία Ἐκάτη φρικώδει φωνῆ·  
 βάρβαρον ἐκκράζουσα θεὰ θεῶ ἡγεμονεύει.

When(?) under the shadowy mountains in the dark-gleaming land a child leads of necessity from the garden of Persephone at milking time the holy four-footed servant of Demeter, the goat with her ceaseless flow of rich milk ... demanding torches for Hekate Einodia (and) with terrible voice the shouting goddess leads the stranger(?) to the god ...

It seems likely that these admittedly obscure verses derive ultimately from a narrative connected with some mystery cult, which is centered around the worship of Demeter, Persephone and a torch-carrying Hekate. Given that two of the three late-classical witnesses to this poem are lead amulets from Sicily or Magna Graecia – the home of numerous cults of the two goddesses – this speculation makes good sense. In all of its early versions, moreover, this poem was used to protect people and property in this world, as the opening lines of the Selinuntine version tells us.<sup>15</sup>

After citing the popular and corrupted version of the first line of the *aski kataski* formula, then, the incantation in PGM LXX 4–25 continues on to make important claims about past ritual performances: “Holy Phobantia(?), I have been initiated and I went down into the chamber of the Daktyls and I saw the other things below: virgin, bitch and all the rest.” These lines seem to contain snatches of dactylic verse (e.g. φοβαντία σεμνή or εἰς μέγαρον κατέβην), and Jordan has suggested that they, too, can be traced back to some hexametrical exemplar of the classical period.<sup>16</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, on the other hand, strikes closer to the mark, I think, when he suggests that they are fragments of rhythmical prose of a

15) “Whosoever hides in a house of stone the letters of these holy words visibly inscribed in tin, the beasts (or demons?) shall not harm him, however many the broad earth rears or loud-groaning Amphitrite nourishes in the sea ...” For discussion, see C. A. Faraone, *Taking the Nestor’s Cup Seriously: Conditional Curses and Erotic Magic in the Earliest Greek Hexameters*, CA 15 (1996) 92–3.

16) So Jordan (above, n. 14) 257–58, who also suggests that the word δακτύλων was originally a scribal or marginal notation indicating that the words were in dactylic hexameters.

type frequently used in liturgical formulas or passwords (συνθήματα) associated with initiations, which lay claim to some special deed performed in the past, e.g. “A kid I fell into milk”, the formula found on the some versions of the Orphic gold tablets, or “I tasted from the κικεών”, a secret password from a Hellenistic mystery cult.<sup>17</sup> The claim to have descended into the cave of the Dactyls is, moreover, probably a reference (as Betz suggests) to an initiation rite of descent connected to the Samothracian mysteries, which seems to have included some kind of underworld vision. But regardless whether the ultimate source of these boasts is Samothracian or South Italian, and regardless whether its original form was poetic or prosaic, it is clear that these formulas are closely connected to or derive from traditional Greek mystery cults and are being used in situations where death is threatening a living person and can be avoided by reciting the formula at a critical moment.

### *Section 2: The Satyr’s Boast in Euripides’ Cyclops*

Now that we are finished with these two preliminary points, let us move on to Euripides’ *Cyclops*. Toward the end of play, when the drunken Polyphemus lies unconscious in his cave, the frightened satyr-chorus resist Odysseus’ suggestion that they take matters into their own hands and gouge out the eye of the Cyclops (630–31). Instead, they offer him an alternative by which these perennial cowards might avoid any contact with the sleeping Polyphemus (646–48):

ἀλλ’ οἶδ’ ἐπαδὴν Ὀρφέως ἀγαθὴν πάνυ,  
ὥστ’ αὐτόματον τὸν δαλὸν ἐς τὸ κρανίον  
στείχονθ’ ὑφάπτειν τὸν μονῶπα παῖδα γῆς.

But I know an incantation of Orpheus, an entirely excellent one, so that on its own accord the burning brand moves towards his skull and sets afire the one-eyed child of earth.

In this play, of course, Polyphemus is a comic ogre, who – like Polemos and Kudoimos in Aristophanes’ *Peace* – must be neutral-

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17) H.D. Betz, Fragments of a Catabasis Ritual in a Greek Magical Papyrus, *History of Religions* 19 (1980) 287–95.



ized in order to achieve the happy resolution of the plot. Despite the comic context, however, it is important to stress the tense dramatic situation, which is well known from the famous scene in the *Odyssey*: like the characters in the *Peace*, Odysseus and company are doomed to die unless they can defeat Polyphemus and escape from his clutches. Since Orpheus very famously descended into the underworld and used his songs to charm Persephone and Hades, one might, of course, interpret the satyrs' claim here as a comically hyperbolic one: just as Orpheus once sang a song to protect himself and Eurydice in Hades, so, too, the satyrs will save themselves.

In this case, however, as in the brief description of the Samothracian prayer in Aristophanes' *Peace*, the specific wording and content of the satyrs' boast suggest that Euripides is echoing a specific type of incantation, and not simply referring in a general way to the famous power of Orphic verse, as we saw earlier, for example, in the *Alcestis* passage. In the first place the satyrs describe the spell as an ἐπωδή, a term which in the extant magical papyri refers almost exclusively to hexametrical verses. Indeed, in its uncontracted poetic form, the word (ἐπαιδιή) shows up at the end of a number of later hexametrical incantations, where it refers self-reflexively to itself, as for example in some charms preserved in late-Hellenistic and early imperial papyri from Egypt, each of which end with the phrase: "bring to perfection a perfect incantation"<sup>18</sup>:

(i) Two love-charms (corrupt) from PGM XX (1st-century BCE)

πότνια θεά, ... τέλεσόν μ[οι] τελέαν ἐπαιδιήν (col. i.  
26–7).  
πότνια) Κυπρογένεια τέλει τελέαν ἐπαιδιήν (col. ii. 25).

Lady goddess . . . bring to perfection for me a perfect  
incantation.  
<Lady> Cyprogeneia, bring to perfection a perfect in-  
cantation.

(ii) A charm for sleep, POxy 4468 (late 1st-century CE):

] Φερσεφόνη τέλεσον τ[ελέαν ἐπαιδιήν] (col. i. 26)

18) W. M. Brashear, *Ein Berliner Zauberpapyrus*, ZPE 33 (1979) 263–64.

... Persephone bring to perfection a p[erfect incanta-  
tion]

We know, however, that this same coda was also used in magical charms in fifth-century Athens, because in his lost play *Amphiarus* Aristophanes composed a parody of a hexametrical love-charm, of which only the last two lines survive.<sup>19</sup>

ὄσφὺν δ' ἐξ ἄκρων διακίγκλισον ἡῦτε κίγκλου  
ἀνδρὸς πρεσβύτου· τελέει δ' ἀγαθὴν ἐπαιοιδὴν

Jiggle from its foundations the rear end of the old man just like a  
jigglebird and bring to perfection an excellent incantation.

I suggest that when the satyrs use the phrase “an entirely excellent incantation of Orpheus” (ἐπωδὴν Ὀρφέως ἀγαθὴν πάνυ) they are echoing or alluding specifically to this popular ending for hexametrical incantations. It is interesting to note, moreover, that unlike the versions of the coda in the papyrus-handbooks from Egypt both Aristophanes and Euripides use the adjective ἀγαθός instead of τέλειος, suggesting that they knew an earlier classical version of the coda or perhaps a local Athenian one.<sup>20</sup>

The satyrs, moreover, claim to have special knowledge when they declare: “I know an incantation of Orpheus ...” (οἶδ' ἐπωδὴν Ὀρφέως). Such a declaration may, in fact, have been part of the incantation itself, for we find a similar boast in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, where the goddess disguises herself as a wet-nurse and boasts about her knowledge of protective magic for babies (227–30):<sup>21</sup>

θρέψω, κοῦ μιν ἕολπα κακοφραδίησι τιθήνης  
οὔτ' ἄρ' ἐπηλυσίη δηλήσεται οὔθ' ὑποταμόν·  
οἶδα γὰρ ἀντίτομον μέγα φέρτερον ὑλοτόμοιο,  
οἶδα δ' ἐπηλυσίης πολυπήμονος ἐσθλὸν ἐρυσμόν.

19) Ael. N. A. 12.9 = Aristophanes, *Amphiarus* fr. 29 (K.-A.). For discussion, see C. A. Faraone, *Aristophanes, Amphiarus* Fr. 29 (K.-A.): Oracular Response or Erotic Incantation?, *CQ* 42 (1992) 320–27.

20) *Ibid.* The non-Attic version is onomatopoeic: τέλει τελέαν.

21) For this text, translation and more discussion, see C. A. Faraone, *The Undercutter, the Woodcutter, and Greek Demon Names Ending in -tōmos* (*Hom. Hymn to Demeter* 228–29), *AJP* 122 (2001) 1–10.

I will nurse him, and I do not expect – through any weak-mindedness of his nurse – that witchcraft or the “Undercutter” will harm him, for I know an antidote far stronger than the “Woodcutter” and for woeful witchcraft I know an excellent defense.

The repetition here of the same verb “I know” (οἶδα) at the start of the last two verses underscores the goddess’ emphatic claim to special knowledge of protective magic, one that is quite similar to the boast of the satyr-chorus.<sup>22</sup> Paul Maas, moreover, pointed out that the second-line of Demeter’s boast here closely echoes a verse from the Cretan version of the late-classical lead amulets discussed earlier.<sup>23</sup> In recent years similar verses of late classical date have surfaced in Sicily and Magna Graecia suggesting that knowledge of this formula was spread far wider than Maas had imagined.<sup>24</sup>

οὐ με καταχρίστ[ωι δ]ηλήσεταιι οὐτ’ ἐπενίκτ[ωι]  
(Phalasarna)

... shall not harm me with ointment or with application

οὐκ ἄν δειλήσ{ετ}αιτ’ {οὐδεῖς} οὐδ’ αἰ  
πολυφάρ[μακοι? (Selinus)]  
οὐ κα δαλήσαιτο οὐδ αἰ πολυφάρμακοι? (Locri)

... may X not harm, nor the women who know many φάρμακα ...

It would seem, therefore, that in the course of boasting about her special knowledge of protective magic, the Demeter actually performs part of a popular incantation, just as (I suggest) the satyrs do in the *Cyclops*. This conclusion is further strengthened by the last

22) For the significance of Demeter’s claim to knowledge of healing magic, see N. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford 1974) 229–31, and P. Scarpi, *Lecture sulla religione classica: L’inno omerico a Demeter*, Università di Padua pubblicazioni della Facoltà di lettere e filosofia 56 (Florence 1976) 159–73.

23) P. Maas, ΕΠΕΝΙΚΤΟΣ, *Hesperia* 13 (1944) 36–37. For the best text of the Cretan tablet from Phalasarna, see D. R. Jordan, *The Inscribed Lead Tablet from Phalasarna*, *ZPE* 94 (1992) 191–94. I give lines S and T of Jordan’s text and his translation, both of which include some minor corrections suggested by Maas; the uncorrected text is: ὄ με καταχρίστ[ωι δ]ηλήσεταιι οὐτε ἐπηνίκτ[ωι] / οὐτε πατῶι [οὐ]τ’ ἐπατωγήι.

24) See D. R. Jordan, *Three Texts from Lokroi Epizephyrioi*, *ZPE* 130 (2000) 96–101, esp. 100, for discussion of these parallels.

two words of Demeter's boast, "an excellent defense" (ἔσθλὸν ἐρυσμόν), which (like the satyrs' boast) also echo the content and final placement of the traditional coda discussed earlier, which ended hexametrical charms with the words "an excellent incantation". These similarities between the boasts of Demeter and the satyrs and the final verse of the Aristophanic love-charm make sense, of course, when we recall that the author of the *Hymn to Demeter*, like Aristophanes and Euripides, probably composed his hymn in the fifth-century somewhere in or near Attica.

There is, then, good reason to think that when the satyrs boast in line 646 that they "know an incantation of Orpheus, an entirely excellent one" they are mimicking the language of popular hexametrical incantations known to Euripides and presumably to his audience as well. The general pattern is clear, then, but why should we believe the satyrs' claim that their incantation is an "Orphic" one? Indeed, precisely what is so "Orphic" about it? There are, in fact, at least two significant details in the satyrs' description of the charm, where Euripides clearly abandons the famous Homeric model for the punishment of Polyphemos, and introduces changes that point to Orphic mythology. The first is the peculiar manner in which the chorus refers to the Cyclops as a "child of Earth", even though earlier in the play both Silenus (lines 21 and 262) and Odysseus (286) refer to him as the son of Poseidon. Why, then, do the satyrs late in this play switch to the Hesiodic genealogy for the Cyclopes and abandon the traditional Homeric one?<sup>25</sup> As it turns out, the designation "child of Earth" does have a special connotation and resonance in an Orphic text. In two of the earliest versions of the Orphic gold tablets (the ones from Petelia and Pharsalos), when the initiates speak to the gatekeepers of the underworld, they describe their qualifications for entry as follows:

I am a child of Earth (Γῆς παῖς εἰμί) and starry Heaven;  
 but my race is heavenly; and this you know yourselves.  
 I am parched with thirst and I perish; but give me  
quickly  
 refreshing water flowing forth from the lake of Memo-  
ry.

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25) At *Odyssey* 1.71–73 we are also told that Polyphemos was the son of Poseidon and the nymph Thoosa, who was herself a child of Phorcys.

Although the later versions of these tablets go out of their way to specify the gender of the owner of the tablet as “a daughter of Earth” or “a son of Earth”, these earlier texts from Petelia and Pharsalos use the same gender-neutral word *παῖς* (“child”) that the satyr-chorus use to describe Polyphemus. In these so-called “passports of the dead”, moreover, it is clear that this earth-born status is a potential liability, since the initiate quickly adds in the second line: “But my race is heavenly.”

An unadulterated “child of Earth”, then, would presumably be barred from drinking water at the lake of Memory, because the Titans, the traditional killers of the Orphic Dionysus were also born from the Earth, a genealogy that is made explicit in one version of the story that Diodorus Siculus cites from the “Orphic poems” (3.62.6–8):<sup>26</sup>

And they say that the god born from Zeus and Demeter (i.e. Dionysus) was torn apart completely by the earthborn ones (ὕπὸ τῶν γηγενῶν) and then boiled up, and that after his limbs had been put back together by Demeter he was born anew ... The statement that he was “torn apart completely by the earthborn ones” signifies the harvesting of the grapes by “earth-workers” (ὕπὸ τῶν γεωργῶν) ... And these stories are in agreement both with the accounts revealed in the Orphic poems (Ὀρφικῶν ποιημάτων) as well as those introduced into their rites, of which it is unlawful to recount in detail for the uninitiated.

It is significant, then, that in their brief description of this Orphic incantation the satyrs identify their enemy and the target of their excellent incantation as one of the primordial enemies of the Orphic Dionysus.

The weapon and anatomical target proposed by the satyrs in their boast are equally interesting from an Orphic perspective: they claim that the incantation will cause a *δαλός* to strike the skull (*κράνιον*) of the victim and set fire to it. In Euripides’ play the term *δαλός* is used more than half a dozen times to refer to the instrument that eventually will blind the Cyclops. This is somewhat different, of course, from the smoldering, fire-hardened pole used in the Homeric account to gouge out and sear the monster’s eye, and in fact is at odds with Odysseus’ own words in Euripides’ play

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26) Cf. the same designation twice more in 3.62.7. The name “Titans” never appears in the passage, and the designation “Earthborn ones” is crucial to the allegorical interpretation that Diodorus gives, which seems in its form (albeit not its sophistication) similar to that of the Derveni commentator.

(lines 455–56), when he lays out his plan to sharpen a pine branch and heat it up in the fire. Indeed, as far as I can tell the term *δαλός* is never used elsewhere to describe the weapon that Odysseus fashions in Polyphemos' cave. So why does Euripides use *δαλός* in the play and why do the satyrs identify Polyphemos' skull (*κρανίον*) as the target of their Orphic attack, rather than the eye of the famously one-eyed creature? The word *δαλός* usually means “burning brand” or “torch”, but it does show up once in the *Iliad* (13.319–20) in a speech of the Cretan hero Idomeneus, who boasts that Hector will not seize the Greek ships “unless the son of Cronos in person should hurl the blazing firebrand” (ὅτι μὴ αὐτός γε Κρονίων / ἐμβάλοι αἰθόμενον δαλόν). Here, of course, the “blazing firebrand” refers to the thunderbolt of Zeus, which in the Orphic context of the satyrs' boast recalls the myth in which Zeus incinerates the Titans as punishment for killing his son Dionysus. The fact, moreover, that this rare meaning of *δαλός* as “thunderbolt” is limited to epic provides added heft to my suggestion above that the satyrs are echoing or paraphrasing a hexametrical incantation attributed to Orpheus.

I suggest, then, that in their boast about the Orphic charm the satyrs, when they abandon the canonical Homeric genealogy for Polyphemos by identifying him as a “son of Earth”, and when they describe the *δαλός* crashing into and setting fire to his skull (not his eye), they do so because they are mimicking a traditional Orphic incantation, which calls down fiery destruction upon the head of a threatening or murderous enemy in imitation of Zeus' punishment of the Titans, those “sons of Earth” who were the primordial enemies of the Orphic Dionysus. It is, however, interesting to note that this Orphic incantation of the satyrs does not, as we might expect, invoke Zeus himself to strike Polyphemos. They boast that their incantation will make the *δαλός* fly through the air “of its own accord” (*αὐτόματον*) and strike the drunken Cyclops. In short: like the Orphic *λόγοι* to which Euripides refers to in his *Alcestis* and *Iphigeneia*, the satyrs' *ἐπὶ* does not require divine help to achieve its goal. There is, moreover, one last detail that suggests Euripides has cast another scene in the *Cyclops* in an “Orphic” manner. In the *Odyssey*, the Cyclops eats his victims without cooking them, whereas in Euripides' satyr-play Polyphemos carefully dismembers them, and then boils and roasts them before he eats, just as the Titans do after

they kill Dionysus.<sup>27</sup> The Orphic charm described by the satyrs, in short, draws renewed attention to Polyphemus' role in the play as a Titanic foe of Dionysus: the flaming δαλός will, in short, crash down upon his head and destroy him for his unspeakable acts of violence and cannibalism against Odysseus' men, just as Zeus destroyed the Titans themselves for similar crimes against his son Dionysus.

The Orphic incantation of the satyrs, therefore, seems to evoke a crucial moment of celestial triumph as a model for the overthrow of a powerful earthly enemy. The triumphal event, moreover, in the Orphic theogonies (as in Hesiod's account) marks the beginning of Zeus' kingship in heaven, when battles and civil strife among the gods cease. Thus the Orphic charm of the satyrs seems to follow a wider pattern of protective incantations, which refer to an important moment in a theogonic or cosmogonic narrative, in order to save the user of the spell when disorder and disaster threatens. Scholars have, in fact, noted that the Greeks sometimes sang theogonies to heal excessive grief or civil strife in a community. Martin West has, for example, suggested that Hesiod composed his *Theogony* to heal the grief of his audience at the funeral games of King Amphidamas,<sup>28</sup> and in the middle of book one of Apollonius' *Argonautica* (492–515) two of the Argonauts – Idmon and Idas – are about to come to blows and destroy the fellowship of the heroes, when Orpheus himself leaps to his feet and performs a short theogony (496–511):

He sang how the earth, the heaven and the sea mingled together in one form, after deadly strife had separated each from the other; and how the stars and moon and the paths of the sun ever kept their fixed place in the sky; and how the mountains rose, and how first of all Ophion and Eurynome, daughter of Ocean, held sway on snowy Olympus, and how, through strength of arm one yielded his prerogative to Cronus and the other to Rhea, and how they fell into the waves of the Ocean; but the other two, meanwhile ruled over the blessed Titan-gods, while Zeus, still a child and with thoughts of a child, dwelt in the Dictaeon

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27) D.S. Rennel, Euripides' *Cyclops* (University of Chicago Dissertation 1986) 136–40. If I am correct in my reading of the *Cyclops*, Euripides knew a version similar to Diodorus Siculus in which the Earthborn ones killed Dionysus, boiled and roasted him, and then ate him, just as the Cyclops does to Odysseus' men. Then Zeus struck them down (presumably on their heads) with a burning thunderbolt.

28) M.L. West, *Hesiod, Theogony* (Oxford 1966) 44–45.

cave; and the earth-born Cyclopes had not yet armed him with thunder and lightning, for these things gave renown to Zeus.

Clearly Orpheus mentions the peaceful mingling of the elements “after strife had separated them” as a model for resolving the dispute between Idmon and Idas, but he moves on from cosmogony to describe one dynastic change in the kingship of heaven, and then ends with a proleptic reference to the third and final kingship of Zeus and his thunderbolts. Apollonius, moreover, emphasizes the magical effect of Orpheus’ song (515: κληθμῶ and θέλκτρον ἄοιδῆς), which enchants the entire company and thereby prevents bloodshed and civic disaster.

I suggest, then, that in this brief passage from the *Cyclops* Euripides mimics an effective incantation attributed to Orpheus that included a special boast of knowledge and that equated an approaching enemy or evil with a traditional enemy of the Orphic Dionysus, appropriately enough, since the satyrs are themselves the special devotees of Dionysus and they are at that very moment living on the island of Sicily, a well known center of Orphic cult. Or perhaps he recalls a more literary production, in which Orpheus himself appeared as a character and made such a boast or prayer, much like the boast of the character Demeter in the passage quoted above from the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*. In either case, just as Demeter boasts her special knowledge of protective magic and displays it by using a line from a well known hexametrical charm in her speech, the satyrs likewise reveal their own knowledge of Orphic poetry by describing and imitating both the form and content of this apparently well known kind of incantation, that made reference to a moment of victory in some Orphic theology.<sup>29</sup>

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