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# The Influence of Orphic Beliefs on the Development of Hellenistic Astrology

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**Liz Greene**

**Abstract.** Orphism has been a scholarly battleground since the 19th century.<sup>1</sup> Past and present conflicts within the field, as well as a general reluctance on the part of researchers to acknowledge the historical importance of astrology, have obscured the relevance of Orphic astrological motifs that may have influenced both the development of Hellenistic astrology and the cosmological aspects of philosophy from the Presocratic period through Plato to the late classical period and beyond.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, there has been little or no research into the astrological dimension of Orphic beliefs. This paper, while not discussing the details of Hellenistic astrological techniques, is intended to open a discussion on the subject of Orphic influences on the development of Hellenistic astrology.

## The nature of Orphism

The Orphic 'religion' seems to have comprised a fluid aggregate of doctrines, rituals, and sacred texts linked by common themes, emerging in northern Greece in the 6th century BCE or possibly earlier, and spreading to Athens, the Greek colonies of southern Italy and Sicily, and eventually Alexandria and Rome.<sup>3</sup> Extant Orphic texts, especially the theogonies describing the creation of the gods and the universe, reflect earlier Egyptian, Babylonian, Phoenician, Iranian and Indian sources, as

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1 See Burkert, Walter, *Babylon, Memphis, Persepolis: Eastern Contexts of Greek Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004) [hereafter Burkert (2004)], p. 74.

2 On researchers' bias against astrology, see Curry, Patrick, 'Astrology on Trial, and its Historians: Reflections on the Historiography of "Superstition"', *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Autumn/Winter 2000) [hereafter Curry, 'Astrology on Trial'], pp. 47-56.

3 Burkert, Walter, *Greek Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987) [hereafter Burkert (1987)], p. 296.

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well as Thracian and Scythian shamanistic beliefs.<sup>4</sup> Like the Eleusinian cult of Demeter and Kore that it was said to have influenced, and the Dionysian rites which it was said to have reformed, Orphism was a mystery religion that successfully preserved the secrecy of its initiation ceremonies.<sup>5</sup> Harrison describes the core doctrine of Orphism as ‘the possibility of attaining divine life’.<sup>6</sup> Guthrie refers to ‘mystical yearnings after a union between man and god’.<sup>7</sup> Through sacred texts, rituals, and daily habits of living, Orphism promised direct knowledge of the mysteries of death and the soul’s potential redemption from the endless cycle of rebirth. Orphic theogonies narrate the primal sin of humanity rooted in its savage Titanic origins, for which purification is necessary

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4 For the Orphic theogonies see West, M. L., *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) [hereafter West (1983)], pp. 68-258, and Guthrie, W. K. C., *Orpheus and Greek Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952) [hereafter Guthrie (1952)], pp. 69-130. On Egyptian influences, see Burkert (2004), pp. 71-98. On Phoenician influences, see West, M. L., ‘*Ab ovo: Orpheus, Sanchuniathon and the Origins of the Ionian World Model*’, *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, Vol. 44, No. 2 (1994). On Babylonian influences see Kirk, G. S., J. E. Raven and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957) [hereafter Kirk *et al.*], p. 22, n. 1; West (1983), pp. 101-102; Guthrie (1952), p. 98. On Iranian influences see Kirk *et al.*, p. 22, n. 1; West (1983), pp. 103-105; Eisler, Robert, *Orpheus the Fisher: Comparative Studies in Orphic and Early Christian Cult Symbolism* (London: Kessinger Publishing, 2001) (originally *Orphisch-dionysische Mysteriengedanken in der christlichen Antike, Leipzig and Berlin*, 1925) [hereafter Eisler (1925)], pp. 24-29 and 42-50. On Indian and shamanistic influences see West (1983), pp. 4-7 and 104.

5 On the relationship between Orphism and the Eleusinian mysteries, see West (1983), p. 24; Bonnechere, Pierre, quoting Strabo, in ‘Trophonius of Lebadea’ in *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults* (London: Routledge, 2003) [hereafter *Mysteries*], p. 170. On the relationship between the Orphic and Dionysian mysteries, see Harrison, Jane, *Prologomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (London: Merlin Press, 1962; 1st edition, 1903) [hereafter Harrison], p. 455; Wili, Walter, ‘The Orphic Mysteries and the Greek Spirit’ in *The Mysteries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955) [hereafter Wili], p. 70; Guthrie (1952), pp. 43-44.

6 Harrison, p. 477.

7 Guthrie (1952), p. 6.

through successive incarnations; earthly life is therefore a kind of expiatory prison, from which the initiate alone can hope for ultimate freedom.

The 6th century CE Neoplatonist Olympiodorus, who had access to older Orphic texts, observes, 'Plato paraphrases Orpheus everywhere.'<sup>8</sup> A good deal of evidence about Orphism is certainly available from Plato, who seems to have been profoundly influenced by it and, in turn, ensured that Orphism influenced the entire Platonic strand of Western philosophy in subsequent centuries. Socrates, in Plato's *Cratylus*, states, 'For some say the body is the grave of the soul. Probably the Orphic poets were the inventors of the name, and they were under the impression that the soul is suffering the punishment of sin, and that the body is an enclosure or prison in which the soul is incarcerated, kept safe...until the penalty is paid.'<sup>9</sup> These ideas were revolutionary in the context of prevailing Homeric and Hesiodic religious beliefs. Burkert suggests that the most important element in Orphism is the radical change in the concept of the soul; it assumes that in every human being 'there is an individual, constant something...that preserves its identity by force of its own essence, independent of the body which passes away.'<sup>10</sup> The soul is no longer an impotent shade wandering eternally through the halls of Hades; it carries a burden that it must atone for, but it is not affected by death. It is immortal, and made of the same stuff as the gods.

Kingsley comments extensively on the scholarly challenge of exploring Presocratic religions – especially the Orphic and Pythagorean – in their own terms, rather than as mere 'crude' precursors to the more rational systems of Plato and Aristotle.<sup>11</sup> Celestial eschatology is an essential feature of Presocratic thought, as demonstrated by a quasi-mythic 'magus' figure such as Empedocles, but it is expressed more

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8 Olympiodorus, *On the Phaedo*, 70c, in Kern, Otto, *Orphicorum fragmenta* (Berlin: 1922) [hereafter Kern], *OF* fr. 224, quoted in Kingsley, Peter, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) [hereafter Kingsley (1995)], p. 112. See also Kingsley (1995), pp. 120-121.

9 Plato, *Cratylus*, 399c in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961) [hereafter *Dialogues*], p. 437.

10 Burkert (1987), p. 300.

11 Kingsley (1995), p. 3.

enigmatically through revelatory poetry than through the ‘rational’ cosmologies of Ionian philosophers such as Thales.<sup>12</sup> It may therefore not be immediately recognisable as astrology in the technical sense found in Hellenistic works such as Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos*. Astrology in this broader context – defined by Curry as ‘the practice of relating the heavenly bodies to lives and events on earth, and the tradition that has thus been generated’ – is likely to be embedded in a mythic and poetic context within the larger religious themes of Orphism, which are themselves the subject of continuing scholarly debate.<sup>13</sup>

### **The battleground of Orphic scholarship**

Orphic scholarship has been hampered by the lack of sound ancient sources, the confusion of spurious texts, and the cultural bias of individual researchers.<sup>14</sup> In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, interest in ancient Greek religion focused on the ritual context of beliefs, with a quest for a ‘pure’ pre-Homeric religion whose tracks might be traced in the rituals and artefacts of later periods. Commenting on the importance of ritual, Harrison observes, ‘What a people *does* in relation to its gods must always be one clue, and perhaps the safest, to what it *thinks*. The first preliminary to any scientific understanding of Greek religion is a minute examination of its ritual.’<sup>15</sup> Orphism as it was then understood, with its mystical vision and its emphasis on ritual, seemed to supply the answer to the quest. The enthusiasm shown toward all things Orphic by early 20th century writers was thus coloured by many preconceptions. The dubious nature of some of the sources, and problems with dating the age of quoted fragments, were sometimes overlooked. Fowden points out that using a pseudonym such as ‘Orpheus’ or ‘Hermes’ was a legitimate practice in antiquity, indicating a particular ‘mode of discourse’ rather than a literal transcription or a forgery.<sup>16</sup> But the inevitable errors caused by this practice were not initially taken into account by Orphic scholars.

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12 Kingsley (1995), pp. 217-232.

13 Curry, Patrick, ‘Astrology’, in *The Encyclopaedia of Historians and Historical Writing*, ed. Kelly Boyd (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), p. 55.

14 Burkert (1987), p. 296.

15 Harrison, p. vii.

In the 1930s, the scholarly backlash to this relative naivety was severe. Increasing specialisation, more rigorous methodology, and the growing dominance of a sociological perspective brought a much-needed caution toward generalisations, but also a dogmatic scepticism which ignored the phenomenology of ancient religious experience and treated virtually every ancient source as untrustworthy. In Germany, Wilamowitz and Thomas published works that dealt a virtual death blow to the whole subject of Orphism; they demonstrated that there had never been such a thing as a unified body of Orphic doctrine, and no such thing as an Orphic ‘church’.<sup>17</sup> Linforth, in *The Arts of Orpheus*, arrived at a similar although less stringent conclusion, persuading Dodds to call Orphism ‘the unconscious projection upon the screen of antiquity of certain unsatisfied religious longings characteristic of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.’<sup>18</sup>

The methodology of these scholars purportedly reflected a concern to ‘determine precisely the significance of the ancient texts which explicitly refer to Orpheus’.<sup>19</sup> But Wilamowitz imposed on the Orphic texts what Hanegraaff describes as ‘a complete worldview based upon a theory...claiming exclusive truth and sufficiency with respect to all dimensions of reality’.<sup>20</sup> Wilamowitz’s approach to the mystical and mysterious in ancient religious thought is expressed in his abhorrence of ‘the horrible superstitions of the magical papyri’, which he thought signified the decay of Greek Homeric and Hesiodic religion rather than

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16 Fowden, Garth, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) [hereafter Fowden], p. 96.

17 Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, U. von, *Der Glaube der Hellenen* (Berlin: 1931-2) [hereafter Wilamowitz]; Thomas, H. W., *Epekeina: Untersuchungen über das Ueberlieferungsgut in den Jenseitsmythen Platons* (Würzburg, 1938); Kingsley (1995), p. 117.

18 Linforth, I. M., *The Arts of Orpheus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1941), pp. 261-289; Dodds, E. R., *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), p. 149.

19 Walton, Francis R., review of *The Arts of Orpheus* by I. M. Linforth, *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (1943), p. 445.

20 Hanegraaff, Wouter J., ‘How magic survived the disenchantment of the world’ in *Religion*, No. 33 (2003), p. 375.

the continuity of another, equally old but living one.<sup>21</sup> An anachronistic projection of what might be interpreted as late Victorian and Edwardian mysticism – the same cultural movement that presided over the birth and spread of the Theosophical Society with its promulgation of an ‘ancient, universal world view’ – can be discerned in early British scholars of Orphism.<sup>22</sup> But while Orphism had clearly never been a ‘church’, it seems to have possessed its own integrity as a flexible network of related sects sharing similar doctrines, written and spoken, concerning the fate of the soul. To Wilamowitz it was evidently inconceivable that something so amorphous could have such an ancient lineage, possess a distinct identity, and exert such great influence on later Greek religion and philosophy. In consequence, Kingsley observes wryly, Wilamowitz and his adherents ‘performed a miracle: acknowledgement of the existence of a genuine, pre-Platonic Orphic literature virtually vanished from the scholarly scene.’<sup>23</sup> As for the possibility of an Orphic astrology, the idea had never even been considered.

Despite spirited counter-attacks by researchers such as Guthrie and Nilsson, mistrust dominated Orphic scholarship for several decades, and to some extent still does.<sup>24</sup> The quoting of ‘ancient’ Orphic theogonies and hymns by late Neoplatonists such as Proclus, Olympiodorus and Damascius was treated with considerable suspicion, despite clear testimonies by Plato to the great antiquity of Orphism.<sup>25</sup> A long history of

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21 Wilamowitz, Vol. 1., p. 10, quoted in Eitrem, Samson, ‘Dreams and Divination in Magical Ritual’ in *Magika Hiera Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, eds. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) [hereafter *Magika Hiera*], p. 175.

22 See, for example, Harrison, p. 657, quoting Gilbert Murray, *Ancient Greek Literature*, p. 272. On the ‘universal world view’ of Theosophy, see Blavatsky, H. P., *Isis Unveiled: Secrets of the Ancient Wisdom Tradition*, ed. Michael Gomes (Wheaton, Ill: Quest Books, 1997), p. xi. For Blavatsky’s belief in Orpheus as the founder of the Western mysteries, see Blavatsky, H. P., *Collected Writings*, Vol. XIV (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1985), pp. 269-273.

23 Kingsley (1995), p. 117.

24 Nilsson, Martin P., ‘Early Orphism’ in *Harvard Theological Review*, 28 (1935).

scholarly ambivalence toward astrology, comprehensively described by Curry, may also have led to potentially helpful works referring to Orpheus, such as Lucian's *De astrologia*, being declared spurious and therefore discounted as reliable sources.<sup>26</sup> It required courage to concede in print that not every Neoplatonist quoting Orpheus as an ancient source was a gullible mystic or a deliberate forger.

Recent archaeological discoveries – the 5th century BCE gold *lamella* from Hipponion, the 6th century BCE bone plaques from Olbia, and the important early 4th century BCE Derveni papyrus containing an even older Orphic theogony, discussed in greater detail below – have honourably reinstated the existence of a Presocratic Orphic literature, although many scholars, such as Kotansky, are still wary.<sup>27</sup> It now seems that Orphic poems were in circulation by at least the middle of the 6th century BCE.<sup>28</sup> Most Orphic scholarship of recent date has focused on the interpretation and implications of the Derveni find, although there is currently a new edition of Kern's massive compilation of textual fragments, the *Orphicorum fragmenta*, in production by Bernabé, classifying the Orphic texts in a more comprehensive fashion.<sup>29</sup> The first volume, published in 2004, concentrates on the theogonies.<sup>30</sup> The next two volumes, not yet published, will include Orphic material on astrological, magical, and divinatory themes.<sup>31</sup> However, confusion and

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25 See, for example, Plato, *Laws*, VI, 782c-d, in *Dialogues*, pp. 1357-58. On current scholarly suspicion, see Kingsley (1995), pp. 120 and 130; Guthrie (1952), pp. 14-15.

26 Curry, 'Astrology on Trial', pp. 47-56; Thorndike, Lynn, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, Vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923) [hereafter Thorndike], p. 282.

27 Kotansky, Roy, 'Incantations and Prayers for Salvation on Inscribed Greek Amulets' [hereafter Kotansky], in *Magika Hiera*, p. 114-115.

28 Burkert (1987), p. 296.

29 Kern, Otto, *Orphicorum fragmenta* (Berlin: 1922) [hereafter Kern].

30 Bernabé, Alberto, *Orphicorum et Orphicis similibus testimonia et fragmenta* (München/Leipzig: K. G. Saur, 2004).



controversy remain. And despite renewed excitement in Orphic scholarship, there has been little interest shown by Orphic scholars toward specifically astrological themes. Nor has it been considered that astrology, especially in the form of celestial eschatology, might have been fundamental rather than incidental to Orphism. As a result of Cumont's declaration that 'sidereal interpretations did not have in Mithraic dogma more than a secondary importance', the central role of astrology in Mithraism remained obscure until the recent work of Ulansey and Beck.<sup>32</sup> And while the 'philosophical' *Hermetica* have been the subject of extensive research and numerous translations, the 'technical' *Hermetica*, including texts on astrology, remain relatively unexplored.<sup>33</sup>

### **Orphic astrological themes**

Taken individually, Orphic astrological fragments are tantalising but obscure. Considering the material thematically is more revealing. No complete early Orphic astrological text exists – only later fragments quoting or referring to these lost works.<sup>34</sup> Because of the eschatological and ritualistic concerns of the movement, Orphic astrological themes tend to be expressed in poetic form, or are embedded in later astrological texts to give a particular eschatological or mystical flavour to the work. However, based on the fragmentary remains, Orphic astrological themes appear to be not only highly sophisticated, but also surprisingly important in the development of later horoscopic interpretation.

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31 Edmonds, Radcliffe G. III, review of Albertus Bernabé, *Orphicorum et Orphicis similium testimonia et fragmenta* in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/bcmr/2004/2004-12.29.html>, downloaded 11.12.05.

32 Ulansey, David, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 16, fn. 2, quoting Franz Cumont, *Textes*, Vol. 1., p. 202; Beck, Roger L., *Planetary Gods and Planetary Orders in the Mysteries of Mithras* (Leiden: Brill, 1988).

33 An exception is the *Liber Hermetis*, trans. Robert Zoller (Berkeley Springs, WV: Golden Hind Press, 1993). See Kingsley, Peter, 'Poimandres: The Etymology of the Name and the Origins of the Hermetica', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 56 (1993), p. 18.

34 West (1983), pp. 1-38.

### 1. Orpheus as a teacher of astrology

Orpheus is described in Greco-Roman texts as a teacher of astrology, and is credited as a source of inspiration by a number of astrologers ranging from the 1st century BCE Roman astrologer Publius Nigidius Figulus to the 4th century CE astrologer Julius Firmicus Maternus.<sup>35</sup> This claim is unlikely to have been made unless there was some kind of corpus of Orphic astrological texts or doctrines, and the implications deserve to be taken seriously. Lucian, in his *De astrologia* (2nd century CE), states categorically that Orpheus, rather than the Babylonians, taught the Greeks astrology, and that the planets were signified by the seven strings of his lyre.<sup>36</sup> In Apollonius Rhodius' 4th century CE *Argonautica*, an 'autobiographical' narrative in which Orpheus tells the story of his voyage with Jason and the Argonauts, Orpheus reminds his fellow shipmates of all he has taught them:

And you have learned the ways of divination  
by beasts and birds, and what the order of the entrails,  
and what is presaged in their dream-roaming paths  
by souls of mortals overcome in sleep;  
answers to signs and portents, the stars' courses,  
the purification rite, great blessing to men,  
placations of gods, and gifts poured out for the dead.<sup>37</sup>

This Neoplatonic Orpheus is a diviner, able to read oracles through entrails and dreams, and a healer who can offer redemption to both the living and the dead. He is also an astrologer, who reveals the mysteries of the heavens.

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35 Nigidius *ap.* Servius, *ad Verg. Ecl.* IV.10, in Bickerman, E., 'The Orphic Blessing', *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Apr. 1939) [hereafter Bickerman], p. 372; West (1983), pp. 32-33; Firmicus Maternus, Julius, *Ancient Astrology, Theory and Practice (Mathesis)*, trans. Jean Rhys Bram (Park Ridge, NJ: Noyes Press, 1975), Book IV, *Proemium*, 5, p. 118, and Book VII, 1, p. 233.

36 Lucian, *De astrologia*, 36, in Thorndike, p. 282.

37 Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 33-39, trans. M. L. West, in West (1983), p. 38.

## 2. The divinity of the four elements

The divinity of the four elements seems to be an important Orphic theme. The elements first appear in Western literature in the work of the 5th century BCE philosopher Empedocles, and they are gods:

Hear first the four roots of all things:  
Dazzling Zeus, life-bearing Hera, Aidoneus, and  
Nestis who moistens the springs of mortals with her tears.<sup>38</sup>

Zeus is equated with air or *aither*, Hera with earth, water with Nestis (the Sicilian epithet for Persephone), and fire with Hades (Aidoneus).<sup>39</sup> According to Kingsley, these lines suggest Orphic influence: Nestis (Persephone) weeping for the death and dismemberment of her son, Dionysus, is the central motif of the Orphic theogonies.<sup>40</sup> From Empedocles onward, the four elements proved immensely influential not only in philosophy, medicine, physics and alchemy, but also in astrology. The elements are grouped in Hellenistic horoscopic astrology as 'trigons' or 'triplicities' (four groups of three zodiac signs each, belonging to fire, earth, air or water) by Dorotheus<sup>41</sup> in the 1st century CE and by Vettius Valens<sup>42</sup> in the 2nd century CE, and are discussed by Ptolemy (2nd century CE) in the context of Aristotle's classification of the substance of the sub-lunar world.<sup>43</sup> But these later astrological presentations of the elements are devoid of any personified divinity.

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38 Empedocles in H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. W. Kranz (Berlin 1951-2), in Kingsley (1995), p. 13.

39 Kingsley (1995), p. 13-14.

40 Kingsley (1995), pp. 348-358. On the Orphic influence on Empedocles, also see Wili, p. 85.

41 Dorotheus Sidonius, *Carmen Astrologicum*, trans. David Pingree (Münich: Saur, 1976), Book I.1.1-6.

42 Valens, Vettius, *Anthologiae*, trans. Robert Schmidt (Berkeley Springs, WV: Golden Hind Press, 1994) [hereafter Valens], Book II.1.

However, the elements are deities in the newly discovered Derveni papyrus, an Orphic theogony dated to the 5th century BCE or earlier, with a commentary by a Macedonian author from the 4th century BCE. In the Derveni papyrus, according to Betegh, air or *aither* is once again Zeus, and earth is Hera (conflated with Demeter and Ge); fire is represented by the Sun as well as by the mysterious ‘first-born’ (possibly Phanes) whose phallus Zeus swallows. Water, of less importance in the Derveni theogony, is linked with the river-god Achelous.<sup>44</sup> These divinised elements possess attributes such as intelligence and intention, as well as sympathy and antipathy, and they collide, transform, and mate with each other. They are not mere inert forms of matter on which planetary influences operate, as in Ptolemy’s scheme. Their presence in the human body is likewise divine, expressed in an Orphic fragment mentioned by Lindsay.<sup>45</sup> The human head is equated with heaven, the eyes are the Sun and Moon, the intellect is fire, the shoulders and back are air, the stomach is earth, the legs are the sea, and the feet are Tartarus, the roots of the earth.

Four lost Orphic works, entitled *Robe*, *Sphere*, *Net* and *Krater*, are mentioned in various ancient authors.<sup>46</sup> A fragment of the *Net* quoted by Aristotle suggests, according to West, an analogy between the formation of a living creature and the knitting of a net; the implication is that the soul is made of *aither* (which in later antiquity was understood as fiery) and occupies the interstices of a living body.<sup>47</sup> The *Robe*, mentioned by Epigenes, Macrobius, and Porphyry, presents the metaphor of weaving; West relates it to ploughing and sowing, and Kingsley suggests that it describes ‘the patchwork garment symbolizing the surface of the earth’.<sup>48</sup>

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43 Ptolemy, Claudius, *Tetrabiblos*, trans. F. E. Robbins (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1940), Book I.18.

44 See Betegh, Gábor, *The Derveni Papyrus: Cosmology, Theology and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) [hereafter Betegh], pp. 189-190, 193-200, 215-217, 230-235.

45 Lindsay, Jack, *Origins of Astrology* (London: Frederick Muller, 1971) [hereafter Lindsay], p. 117, quoting Kern, *OF* 168.

46 West (1983), p. 10-11 and p. 33.

47 Kingsley (1995), p. 15; West (1983), p. 10.

48 West (1983), p. 10; Kingsley (1995), p. 140.

The *Krater* may be related to the great cosmic mixing-bowl described by Plato, in which the Demiurge blends the world-soul with the souls of human beings.<sup>49</sup> Kingsley refers to Empedocles' image of mixing wine and water as Love mixed the cosmic substances to produce mortal things.<sup>50</sup> This suggests a connection with the element of water. The Orphic *Sphere* is mentioned only in a scholia on Homer.<sup>51</sup> West suggests that, based on remaining fragments of his work, Nigidius Figulus derived much of his material from the Orphic *Sphere*.<sup>52</sup> Its title implies a relationship with the cosmic sphere, and perhaps with air, the primal element symbolising the divine Mind in both Empedocles and the Orphic theogony of the Derveni papyrus.<sup>53</sup> The dating of these works is uncertain, but according to Kingsley, all but the *Sphere* were traditionally credited to an Orphic-Pythagorean philosopher called Zopyrus (5th century BCE).<sup>54</sup> The *Sphere* too may belong to this date, and the four books may comprise an Orphic presentation of the divine elements.

The elements are also linked in Orphic doctrine with celestial eschatology. Seaford suggests that Aeschylus, in his trilogy of plays known as the *Prometheia*, drew his theme of Prometheus' redemption *via* the transformation of the elements from the same 'mystic pattern of ideas' that shaped the cosmological doctrines of Empedocles.<sup>55</sup> Orphic influences on Empedocles and Aeschylus are discussed by various scholars, although Seaford, perhaps haunted by the ghost of Wilamowitz, refrains from mentioning the name of the 'mystic pattern of ideas' to

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49 Plato, *Timaeus*, 35 and 41d in *Dialogues*, p. 1165 and p. 1170.

50 Kingsley (1995), pp. 134-35.

51 West (1983), p. 33.

52 West (1983), pp. 32-33. Also see Lindsay, pp. 218-222.

53 Betegh, pp. 194-195 and 219.

54 Kingsley (1995), pp. 140 and 143.

55 Seaford, Richard, 'Immortality, Salvation and the Elements' in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 90 (1986) [hereafter Seaford], p. 11.

which he refers.<sup>56</sup> But he observes that one of the Orphic *lamellae*, Gold Leaf 'C' from Thurii, contains, in its references to the soul's redemption, the idea of the elements as deities and the mixtures, conflicts, and transformations that occur between them during the soul's cyclical return.<sup>57</sup>

Plato's linking of the elements to the plane figures and solids retains some divinity, although the divine qualities have been rendered abstract.<sup>58</sup> Aristotle demythologised the elements entirely.<sup>59</sup> Astrological texts from Ptolemy onward no longer reflect their divinity, although their sympathies and antipathies are retained and have formed the basis of astrological interpretation of the zodiacal signs from Hellenistic through to modern times.<sup>60</sup> In Mithraic doctrines of the 1st and 2nd centuries CE, the elements are deified, but Mithraism, unlike the mainstream of Hellenistic astrology, retained blatant Orphic influences in its beliefs and iconography.<sup>61</sup> However, transmission of the divinised elements from the Orphic-Pythagorean communities of southern Italy and Sicily into Egypt seems to have resulted in the elements retaining their roles as active cosmic agents in the Hermetic texts of the 1st and 2nd centuries CE and the magical papyri of late antiquity.<sup>62</sup> From here they found their way

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56 For Orphic influences on Empedocles and Aeschylus, see, for example, Wili, p. 85; Guthrie (1952), pp. 232-235; Kingsley (1995), pp. 348-358.

57 Seaford, p. 22.

58 Plato, *Timaeus*, 52d-56c in *Dialogues*, pp. 1180-1182.

59 Aristotle, *On the Heavens*, trans. W. K. C. Guthrie (London: Heinemann, 1986), III.2-4, pp. 283-87.

60 For modern astrological interpretations of the elements, see Leo, Alan, *Astrology for All* (London: Fowler, 1969), pp. 52-54; Hone, Margaret, *The Modern Textbook of Astrology* (London: Fowler, 1951) [hereafter Hone], pp. 37-40; Harvey, Charles and Suzi, *Principles of Astrology* (London: Thorsons, 1999), pp. 121-127.

61 Cumont, Franz, *The Mysteries of Mithra* (New York: Dover, 1956; original edition Open Court Publishing Co., 1903), pp. 115-119; Eisler (1925), p. 6; Clauss, Manfred, *The Roman Cult of Mithras*, trans. Richard Gordon, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 165-167.

into Greco-Egyptian alchemy, were appropriated by Arab and Byzantine scholars, and returned to the West full-blown in the alchemical treatises of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.<sup>63</sup>

### 3. The Sun in the middle

Another astrological theme connected with Orphism is the central position of the Sun. In the Derveni papyrus, the Orphic theogony, describing the creation of the material universe, states: 'For when the Sun is separated and confined in the middle, he [Zeus] holds fast both what is above the Sun and what is below it.'<sup>64</sup> As the Orphic theogony on which the papyrus is based has been dated to the 5th century BCE or earlier, this central position of the Sun not only predates and contradicts the order of the planetary spheres offered by Plato in the *Timaeus* (in which the Sun follows the Moon and is not 'in the middle'), but also predates the 'Chaldaean' order based on the observed distance of the planets from the earth (in which the Sun is centrally placed between the spheres of Venus and Mars).<sup>65</sup> There has been much speculation about this passage in the Derveni papyrus, rendered more confusing by Pythagorean texts that refer to the 'central fire' or 'hearth' of the cosmos.<sup>66</sup> It is unclear whether the Derveni papyrus refers to a heliocentric cosmos or to a cosmos with a central fire around which the spheres of the heavenly bodies, including the centrally placed Sun, orbit. Both possibilities would anticipate by two centuries the heliocentric theory of Aristarchos and the 'Chaldaean order'

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62 See Kingsley, Peter, 'From Pythagoras to the *Turba philosophorum*: Egypt and Pythagorean Tradition' in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 57 (1994), 1-13.

63 On the divinised elements in Renaissance and 17th century philosophical alchemy see Jung, C. G., *Psychology and Alchemy*, CW12 (London: Routledge, 1953); *Alchemical Studies*, CW13 (London: Routledge, 1967) [hereafter Jung, CW13]; *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, CW14 (London: Routledge, 1963).

64 Column 15 in the Derveni papyrus, in *Studies on the Derveni Papyrus*, eds. André Laks and Glenn W. Most (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) [hereafter *Studies on the Derveni Papyrus*], p. 16. Also see different translation possibilities in Betegh, Column 15, p. 33, and p. 235, fn. 31.

65 Plato, *Timaeus*, 39b in *Dialogues*, p. 1168; Barton, Tamsyn, *Ancient Astrology* (London: Routledge, 1994) [hereafter Barton], p. 199.

66 See the discussion in Betegh, pp. 235-243. Also see Kingsley (1995) on the 'central fire', pp. 172-194.

attributed to Archimedes and adopted by Hellenistic astrology.<sup>67</sup> Either way the Sun, according to the Orphic theogony, is in the middle, and is placed there for the first time in any known ancient text.

The personification of the planetary gods is also an Orphic theme, and probably derives from Babylonian sources.<sup>68</sup> But the character of these Orphic gods seems distinctly un-Babylonian. In the Derveni papyrus, the Sun is a phallus, while Zeus is a great Mind or Intelligence governing the order of the cosmos.<sup>69</sup> The Moon, equated with the primal Orphic deity Night, is both an oracle and a 'nurse'.<sup>70</sup> In a fragment from Nigidius Figulus quoted by Lucan, Saturn (the Greek Kronos) is described as 'kindling his black fires', an atypical image in Hellenistic astrology which may reflect the Orphic idea of Kronos as a subterranean deity related to the dark and fiery underworld.<sup>71</sup> The mythic personification of the planetary gods all but vanishes from astrological texts by Ptolemy's time; the planets are still divine, but they no longer have personalities. Planetary myths resurface, like the divinity of the elements, in Greco-Egyptian alchemical texts that perpetuate the living planetary gods into the Renaissance and beyond.<sup>72</sup>

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67 Betegh, p. 236, fn. 33; p. 240.

68 Koch-Westenholz, Ulla, *Mesopotamian Astrology: An Introduction to Babylonian and Assyrian Celestial Divination* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 1995), pp. 120-21; Lindsay, pp. 24 and 58.

69 Column 13 in the Derveni papyrus, in Betegh, p. 29; Column 17 in the Derveni papyrus, in Betegh, p. 37; also see the discussion by Betegh on pp. 209-215, 273-74.

70 Column 10 of the Derveni papyrus, in Betegh, p. 23. See also Kingsley (1995), p. 136, on the Orphic oracle shared by Night and the Moon in Plutarch's *De sera*, 566a-c.

71 Lucan, I.652, in Getty, R. J., 'The Astrology of P. Nigidius Figulus (Lucan I, 649-65)', *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 1-2 (Jan.-Apr. 1941), p. 17; Kingsley (1995), p. 71 fn. 1 and p. 355.

72 See, for example, translation and commentary on the 3rd century CE alchemist Zosimos in Jung, CW13, 'The Visions of Zosimos', pp. 59-108; also Fowden, pp. 87-91.



#### 4. Orphic celestial eschatology and astral magic

The doctrine of the soul's ascent and descent to and from the heavens seems to have been an essential aspect of Orphic eschatological teaching and ritual. The origins of this belief probably lie in Egyptian and Iranian cosmology, but it developed along unique lines in the Greek mysteries.<sup>73</sup> Concern with the fate of the soul after death, and the desire to ensure freedom from successive rebirths in earthly bodies, is described on the 5th to 4th century BCE Orphic gold plates or *lamellae* found in tombs all over the Greek world but concentrated in southern Italy, Crete and northern Greece.<sup>74</sup> The central theme of these small, thin gold leaves, inscribed with ritual formulae and buried with the deceased, is the supplication of Persephone and Dionysus (her son in Orphic doctrine) for entry into the celestial company of the holy. Most of the *lamellae* contain repeated references to freedom from the 'circle of heavy grief', as demonstrated by one found at Thurii in southern Italy:

For I too claim to be of your blessed race,  
but Fate overcame me, and the hurler of the lightning bolt [Zeus].  
But I have flown out from the circle of heavy grief  
and stepped swift-footed upon the circle of joy.<sup>75</sup>

Kotansky argued that the Orphic *lamellae* are magical in nature: talismans whose invocations are designed to influence the underworld guardians and ensure that the soul is freed from the circle of rebirth and can ascend to its heavenly home.<sup>76</sup> The *lamellae* are not astrological in a technical sense, although the 'circle' may be not only the circle of successive incarnations, but also the circle of fate symbolised by the constellations along the path of the ecliptic. An inscription on a Greek funeral stele from the Crimea, supporting the evidence of the *lamellae*,

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73 Burkert (2004), pp. 71-98; Lindsay, pp. 92 and 131-32.

74 For details of the *lamellae*, see Cole, Susan G., 'Landscapes of Dionysus and Elysian Fields' in *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults* (London: Routledge, 2003) [hereafter Cole], pp. 193-217; Guthrie (1952), pp. 171ff; West (1983), pp. 22-23.

75 West (1983), p. 23.

76 Kotansky, pp. 114-116.

refers to the deceased as *metachronios*, defined by Bickerman as an astrological term found in the 2nd century CE *Anthologiae* of Vettius Valens and referring to a death in middle age. The dead man is claimed to have ‘escaped from the circle of dire calamities’; he is an Orphic initiate who has been freed from the prison of earthly life and the ‘circle of heavy grief’.<sup>77</sup>

The gold *lamella* from Hipponion in southern Italy is the most recently discovered and the oldest (5th century BCE), and has the longest text.<sup>78</sup> It presents a claim similar to those of other *lamellae*: the deceased is ‘the child of Earth and of starry Sky’, and therefore, by virtue of the soul’s divinity (despite the earthy, Titanic nature of the now defunct body), belongs in the heavenly company of the immortals.<sup>79</sup> On inscribed bone plaques dated to the 6th century BCE and found in tombs at Olbia – one of the most northern Greek colonies in what is now Ukraine, where Herodotus observed initiation ceremonies being celebrated in the 5th century BCE – the same themes are expressed.<sup>80</sup> The deceased declares to the underworld deities, ‘I belong to the heavenly lineage.’<sup>81</sup> One of these bone plaques refers to both *Bakchoi* and *Orphikoi*, thereby confirming the Orphic-Dionysian nature of the ceremonies Herodotus witnessed.<sup>82</sup> The magical formulae of the *lamellae* and the bone plaques may be related to the idea of the ascent through the planetary spheres, for which one brief but important textual reference remains: a lost Orphic work called *Lyra*. This work is known only from a scholium on Virgil discovered in a Paris manuscript in 1925, but its source is Varro, a friend of Cicero involved in the same Neopythagorean circles at Rome as Nigidius Figulus.<sup>83</sup> The text of the scholium reads:

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77 Bickerman, pp. 370-371.

78 Cole, p. 200.

79 Cole, p. 200.

80 Herodotus, 4.79, quoted in Cole, p. 207.

81 Cole, p. 208.

82 Betegh, p. 341.

83 Nock, A. D., ‘The Lyra of Orpheus’, *The Classical Review*, Vol. 41, No. 5 (Nov. 1927), pp. 169-171; Kingsley (1995), pp. 317, 322 fn. 20, 324-25.

Some people, however, say that the lyre of Orpheus had seven strings, and the sky has seven zones, and hence a theological explanation is given. But Varro says that a book of Orpheus on the summoning of the soul is called *Lyra*, and it is denied that souls can ascend without a lyre.<sup>84</sup>

Nock relates this text to the widespread belief, described by Servius in his 4th century CE commentary on Virgil, that in its earthward descent into incarnation the soul gains a sin on passing each planetary sphere: sloth from Saturn, wrath from Mars, lust from Venus, greed from Mercury, and ambition from Jupiter.<sup>85</sup> The same process is repeated on the heavenward journey after death: a sin is 'lost' or expiated in each planetary sphere. Servius does not mention the spheres of the Sun and Moon, but his passage echoes a similar one in the *Hermetica*, whose various compilations, developed over two centuries or more, may have absorbed considerable material from Orphic-Pythagorean sources.<sup>86</sup> This passage describes the heavenward return of the soul and includes the spheres of the Sun and Moon, attributing the sin of 'domineering arrogance' to the Sun and the 'force which works increase and that which works decrease' to the Moon.<sup>87</sup>

The *Lyra* may have contained an account of the musical scale formed by the planetary spheres (equated with the seven strings of Orpheus' lyre) and a description of the soul's ascent to heaven through them.<sup>88</sup> The idea of a cosmic lyre, first found in the 5th century BCE in the poetry of Scythinus, was initially associated with the cycle of the seasons and the four elements, but was soon related to the 'harmony of the spheres' and

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84 West (1983), p. 30.

85 Servius, *ad Aen.*, VI.714, quoted in Nock, p. 170; also see Barton, p. 111.

86 *Hermetica*, trans. Brian P. Copenhaver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), introduction pp. xxvi-xxix; Kingsley (1995), pp. 233-249; Fowden, pp. 144 and 178.

87 *Hermetica*, trans. Sir Walter Scott (Boston: Shambhala, 1993), I. 25.

88 West (1983), p. 30.

the notion of using music to influence the natural order.<sup>89</sup> This was an attribute of the mythic Orpheus, who first appears in the 6th century BCE poetry of Simonides with the magical power of beguiling the animals, the stones, and even the guardians of the underworld – a power that the Orphic *lamellae* appear to invoke.<sup>90</sup> The astrologer Hyginus in the 1st century BCE, quoting a 3rd century BCE text attributed to Eratosthenes, states that the constellation of Lyra was created in the heavens by Zeus to honour Orpheus' music.<sup>91</sup> Cicero, in the *Somnium Scipionis*, also alludes to the use of the lyre to help ascending souls:

By imitating this [the music of the spheres] on their strings and in song, learned men have opened the way for themselves to return to this place [heaven], like others of outstanding gifts who have devoted earthly life to studying the divine.<sup>92</sup>

Thorndike refers to a description by Saint Cyprian, bishop of Antioch in the 3rd century CE, about Orphic mysteries into which he was initiated when a boy of fifteen.<sup>93</sup> His initiation was conducted by seven hierophants and included the meaning of musical notes and harmonies, as well as the governing of times and seasons by good and evil spirits. Thorndike concludes that 'perhaps astrology formed an important part of Orphic lore'.<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately, Orphic scholars have not yet acknowledged this possibility. The magical and astrological implications of music as a means of assisting the soul on its planetary journey seem clearly indicated from these examples. Janowitz comments that the technique of singing hymns to help the soul ascend 'reappears in a variety of later ritual texts',

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89 West (1983), pp. 30-31.

90 Gantz, Timothy, *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 721-25.

91 Condos, Theony, *Star Myths of the Greeks and Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1997), pp. 133-35.

92 Cicero, M. Tullius, *Somnium Scipionis* in *De republica*, 6.18, trans. Richard Hooker, [www.wsu.edu/~dee/ROME/SCIPIO.HTM](http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/ROME/SCIPIO.HTM), downloaded 8.11.05.

93 Thorndike, p. 296.

94 Thorndike, p. 296.

giving as an example the 'Mithras Liturgy' found in an early 4th century CE Greek magical papyrus.<sup>95</sup> According to the text, the soul, assisted by the recitation of hymns and sacred writings, enters on its journey past the planets to the highest heaven.<sup>96</sup>

### 5. Orphic number symbolism

The sacred nature of numbers appears to have its roots in Babylon.<sup>97</sup> Orphic-Pythagorean number symbolism absorbed this theme and developed it to a high degree of sophistication, exercising a considerable influence on Hellenistic astrology, as well as on Platonic philosophy. The divinity of numbers provides the essential structure of horoscopic practice from Hellenistic times to the present. The modern astrological 'aspects' or angular relationships between planets are still based on number symbolism, as are the elemental trigons.<sup>98</sup> Orphism and Pythagoreanism were at times virtually interchangeable, leading to the creation of the term 'Orphic-Pythagorean' at the end of the 19th century, and during the century or more before Plato's time there was an extremely close link between Pythagoreanism and the production of Orphic literature.<sup>99</sup> The works of the Neopythagorean astrologers Nigidius Figulus and Thrasyllus (astrologer to the emperor Tiberius in the 1st century CE, and editor of Plato's *Dialogues*) remain only in fragments, and it is impossible to know in what sense their astrology might have been 'Orphic'.<sup>100</sup> Bickerman

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95 Janowitz, Naomi, *Magic in the Roman World: Pagans, Jews and Christians* (London: Routledge, 2001) [hereafter Janowitz], p. 80.

96 Janowitz, p. 80.

97 On Babylonian sacred numbers, see Campion, Nicholas, *The Great Year: Astrology, Millenarianism and History in the Western Tradition* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 78.

98 For a Greco-Roman example see Thorndike on Vitruvius, p. 184. Also see Geneva, Ann, *Astrology and the Seventeenth Century Mind* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 154-55. For modern examples, see Leo, Alan, *How to Judge a Nativity* (Edinburgh: International Publishing Co., 1965), pp. 39-48; Hone, pp. 180-84.

99 Dieterich, A., *Nekyia* (Liepzig, 1893), quoted in Kingsley, p. 139. Also see Kirk *et al.*, pp. 220-221; Kingsley, p. 115.

suggests that ‘Orphism was probably absorbed by Neopythagoreanism’, and, had their work survived, these astrologers could have provided a fuller picture of the role of Orphic ideas in the development of Hellenistic astrology.<sup>101</sup> However, based on existing fragments, Lindsay notes that Nigidius espoused the Orphic idea of the soul’s passage through the planetary spheres, and Tarrant points out that Thrasyllus wrote at least one work on the music of the spheres.<sup>102</sup>

In a lost Orphic text called the *Hieros Logos*, dated to the Hellenistic period, ‘Pythagoras’ claims to have derived from Orpheus his knowledge that number is the essence of the universe.<sup>103</sup> Another Orphic poem, also of Hellenistic date, is known as the *Hymn to Number*.<sup>104</sup> Orphic-Pythagorean number symbolism also found its way into the prognosticative numerology of 1st and 2nd century CE astrologers such as Valens, Demetrius and Balbillus (astrologer to the emperor Claudius).<sup>105</sup> But the greatest impact of Orphic-Pythagorean number symbolism seems to have been on the Neoplatonists, not only indirectly through Plato, but also directly from older Orphic literature. The testimony of Iamblichus, writing in the late 3rd to early 4th century CE, demonstrates the high regard in which Orpheus’ purported knowledge of the divinity of numbers was held in late antiquity. In *On the Pythagorean Life*, Iamblichus effectively demotes Pythagoras to the status of a disciple of Orpheus.<sup>106</sup> Iamblichus, like Damascius, Olympiodorus, and other

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100 On Thrasyllus, see Tarrant, Harold, *Thrasyllan Platonism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993) [hereafter Tarrant], p. 1-11.

101 Carcopino, J., *Virgile et le mystère de le IVe éclogue* (1930), p. 52ff, quoted in Bikerman, p. 373, fn. 8.

102 Lindsay, pp. 219-220; Tarrant, p. 8.

103 West (1983), p. 29.

104 West (1983), p. 29.

105 Valens, Book III.12, Book IV.1-3, 9, 26, 30, Book V.6; *Catalogus Codex Astrologorum Graecorum*, ed. Franz Cumont, 12 volumes (Brussels: Lamertin, 1898-1953) [hereafter *CCAG*], 1, 104-106 in Schmidt, Robert (trans.), *The Astrological Record of the Early Sages in Greek* (Berkeley, WV: Golden Hind Press, 1995) [hereafter *Sages*], p. 62; *CCAG* 8,3, 103-104 in *Sages*, p. 66.

Orphicising Neoplatonists, probably had access to Orphic works which are now lost. The close resemblance between the Orphic theogony known as the *Rhapsody*, quoted by Proclus in the 5th century CE, and the Orphic theogony in the Derveni papyrus written nearly a thousand years earlier, confirms this.<sup>107</sup> Far from inventing the Orphic theogonies, the Neoplatonists appear to have been remarkably faithful to the originals. 'It is no longer disputed,' Iamblichus informs us, 'that Pythagoras took his inspiration from Orpheus in composing his account of the gods.'<sup>108</sup> He then goes on to state that Pythagoras 'derived from the Orphics his concept of divine being as defined by number.'<sup>109</sup> And finally, he remarks, 'Pythagoras...honoured the gods as Orpheus did, setting up carved and bronze images, linking the gods not to human form but to the divine foundations, in form and nature like all there is, as they encompass all and take thought for all.'<sup>110</sup>

Iamblichus' involvement in magical operations seems related to this last statement, since the 'carved and bronze images' suggest talismanic magic – echoing the much older Orphic *lamellae* meant to invoke the benevolent response of the guardians of the underworld. Iamblichus often refers to astrology in *De Mysteriis*. But he is opposed to the idea that the individual's fate is utterly determined by the birth horoscope, and asserts that through magic, the soul can be 'elevated' to a higher plane; it 'departs from subordinate natures, exchanges the present for another life, and gives itself to another order of things.'<sup>111</sup> The Orphic sentiments seem clear.

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106 Iamblichus, *On the Pythagorean Life*, trans. Gillian Clark (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989) [hereafter Iamblichus, *Pythag.*], 28.146-151.

107 Proclus, *On the Cratylus of Plato*, 391d, in Betegh, p. 114.

108 Iamblichus, *Pythag.*, 28.146.

109 Iamblichus, *Pythag.*, 28.147.

110 Iamblichus, *Pythag.*, 28.151.

111 Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, 270.9-11, trans. Thomas Taylor (Frome: Prometheus Trust, 1999), pp. 140-141; Shaw, Gregory, *Theurgy and the Soul: the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), p. 43 fn. 19.

### Orphic technical astrological fragments

A lost Orphic work called *Ephemerides* is mentioned in passing by West, who refers to it as ‘astrological’.<sup>112</sup> It hints at a more technical astrology than other Orphic fragments. Weinstock states that the *Ephemerides* was ‘certainly earlier than the Hellenistic period’, and was a combination of a hemerology (a list of lucky and unlucky days of the month) and a listing of the lunar mansions (the twenty-eight stars or constellations on the Moon’s path during its twenty-eight-day cycle).<sup>113</sup> This type of work was based on Babylonian and Egyptian sources and may have been developed by the Orphics as early as the 6th century BCE.<sup>114</sup> The *Ephemerides* may have been the source of the material on lunar mansions used by Dorotheus of Sidon (c. 1st century CE), and may also be related to poems mentioned by Herodotus that assigned the days of the month to certain divinities and predicted character and fate on the basis of an individual’s birthday.<sup>115</sup> The *Ephemerides* evidently symbolised the ‘divine birthdays’ of the gods with different animals representing the twenty-eight lunar mansions and the quality of each specific day. The first day of each new lunar cycle was associated with the constellation of Aries and was represented by a young unicorn. Weinstock supports his conclusions with an Orphic verse quoted by Proclus: ‘Just as the Sun changes its figure every hour, so does the Moon every day’.<sup>116</sup> Why this work should be specifically Orphic, other than that it is purportedly written by Orpheus, is unclear. But if it is indeed the product of Orphic circles, an involvement in the development of technical astrology is indicated.

An Orphic astrological poem called *Dodecaeterides* is also mentioned by Weinstock, and in passing by Tsantsanoglu and West.<sup>117</sup> The single

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112 West (1983), p. 33, fn. 100.

113 Weinstock, Stefan, ‘Lunar Mansions and Early Calendars’ in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 69 (1949) [hereafter Weinstock], p. 58.

114 Weinstock, p. 48. On the Babylonian and Egyptian origins of the lunar mansions also see Tester, Jim, *A History of Western Astrology* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1987), pp. 38-39 and 82-84.

115 Weinstock, p. 56, fn. 38; Herodotus, II. 82, in Weinstock, p. 57.

116 Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus of Plato*, I.107d, quoted in Weinstock, p. 65.



remaining fragment reveals that the *Dodecaeterides* opens with the standard preface of mystical sacred texts: the uninitiated should ‘close their ears’.<sup>118</sup> Weinstock believes the *Dodecaeterides* was a prognosticative interpretation of the twelve-year cycle of Jupiter through the constellations, and he compares it with the later Hellenistic *Dodecaeteris Chaldaica* in which consecutive years of the cycle are subject to consecutive signs of the zodiac, each ruled by its planetary lord according to the Hellenistic system.<sup>119</sup> The order is thus identical to that of the *Ephemerides*, but in relation to years rather than days, and the Hellenistic association of zodiac signs with their planetary rulers has superseded the constellations. As so little remains of this text, it is impossible to know why the work might be Orphic; but once again, a high level of interest in technical astrology is suggested.

Further fragments suggest astrological themes. In an Orphic poem from the 2nd century CE called *Thyepolikon*, Orpheus summons to an initiation ceremony not only Earth, Sun, Moon and Stars, but Winds, Thunders, and the ‘parts of the four-pillared cosmos’.<sup>120</sup> It is echoed by another, earlier poem known as the *Orphic Oaths*, mentioned by the 2nd century CE Neoplatonist Theon of Smyrna, in which the initiate swears by the elemental powers Fire and Water, Earth and Sky, as well as by Sun and Moon, Phanes and Night – the last two being the primal Orphic deities responsible for the creation of the universe.<sup>121</sup>

### Conclusion

After many decades of scholarly suspicion and denial, the discovery of the Derveni papyrus has reinstated Orphism as a genuine and profoundly influential dimension of Greek Presocratic religious thought. This remarkable archaeological find also supports other Orphic material indicating that celestial eschatology was fundamental to Orphism. This suggests that astrology may have been far more important to Orphic

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117 Tsantsanoglu, K., ‘The First Columns of the Derveni Papyrus’ [hereafter Tsantsanoglu] in *Studies on the Derveni Papyrus*, p. 127; West (1983), p. 33, fn. 100.

118 Tsantsanoglu, p. 127.

119 Weinstock, p. 65; *CCAG* 5, 4, 172ff.

120 West (1983), p. 36.

121 West (1983), p. 34.

doctrine than has yet been recognised. Astrological themes such as the four divine elements, the sacred nature of numbers, and the central position of the Sun, hint at a far-reaching although diffuse contribution to the entire development of Greek philosophy, especially through Plato. A major impact on later Hellenistic astrology is also indicated. Other Orphic textual fragments suggest that specific astrological techniques were being developed in Orphic circles as early as the 6th century BCE. Bernabé's welcome reorganisation of the Orphic fragments could allow important astrological material to be translated and made accessible to a wider circle of scholars, including those with the specific astrological knowledge necessary for identifying obscure technical references. It may still prove impossible to fully grasp Orphic astrology without further archaeological discoveries. But this should not preclude recognition of the importance of Orphic themes in the development of Hellenistic astrology.