

## THE FIRE NEXT TIME. COSMOLOGY, ALLEGORESIS, AND SALVATION IN THE DERVENI PAPYRUS\*

for Angela

### I. INTRODUCTION

JUST in case there were any hardened sceptics who still doubted, in the second half of the twentieth century, that our world is ruled by an inept and rather junior God with immature judgment and a nasty sense of humour, He did his best to convince them by arranging for the discovery of the Derveni papyrus in 1962. The soldier who was cremated and buried in that Macedonian village towards the end of the fourth century BC had intended that the text of this papyrus be devoured by the flames of his pyre; but as it happened one of the burning logs fell onto the roll, covering and charring its top third and thereby saving that part both from immediate annihilation by the fire itself and from subsequent destruction by organic decomposition; then the Greek excavators sharp-wittedly recognized that the roll was not wood but papyrus, and the restorer of the Viennese papyrus collection managed to put together the more than 200 fragments into 26 columns of text. As A.E. Housman wrote in another connection, such a series of highly unlikely incidents can evidently not be ascribed to ‘chance and the common course of nature’, but only to divine intervention: ‘and when one considers the history of man and the spectacle of the universe I hope one may say without impiety that divine intervention might have been better employed elsewhere’.<sup>1</sup>

To be sure, God’s bungled attempt to convince the doubters has still not succeeded. But it has at least provided us with one of the most remarkable documents of Greek literature to have been discovered in this century. The Derveni text is not only the oldest literary papyrus that has ever been found, but also one of very few to have been discovered in Greece itself; and its contents—eschatological doctrines, exposition of funeral rites, and an allegorical commentary on an Orphic theogony in terms of Presocratic physics—make it a uniquely important piece of evidence for the history of ancient Greek religion, philosophy, and literary criticism. Yet the esoteric nature of its contents has been replicated in the delayed and incomplete circumstances of its publication. More than a third of a century after its discovery, the Greek text as a whole is still not available in an authorized publication; instead, for decades photographs and publications of small parts of the text and unauthorized transcriptions and translations of larger portions<sup>2</sup> have been circulating among scholars in an uncontrolled and chaotic twentieth century version of what Plato in his *Republic* already referred to as the ‘noisy mob of books, βιβλῶν ὄμαδος, by Orpheus and Musaeus’ in his own day.<sup>3</sup> The result has been an aura of mystery surrounding the papyrus which has put many modern scholars into the same position of frustration and curiosity regarding the contents of this Orphic papyrus as some of the ancient uninitiated must have felt with regard to the contents of the doctrines it expounds. The mystery

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<sup>1</sup> A.E. Housman, (ed.), *M. Manilii Astronomicon Liber Primus* (London 1903) xxxii.

<sup>2</sup> Especially ‘Der orphische Papyrus von Derveni’, *ZPE* 47 (1982) after p. 300.

<sup>3</sup> Plato *Rep.* 2.364e.

has been further compounded by the document's intrinsic difficulty. For not only is no reliable edition of the text available; even if one were, much of the papyrus itself is evidently in such desperate physical condition that reading it and supplementing it require a rare combination of ingenuity, erudition, and foolhardiness. And it is not only the physical state of the papyrus that poses enormous problems; the very nature of its contents is such that, even if an intact manuscript had managed to reach us, its interpretation would inevitably have been difficult and controversial.

Understandably, many scholars have been reluctant to publish studies of a text for which no reliable basis for research was available. Nonetheless, an enormous bibliography has grown up around the Derveni papyrus since the 1960s.<sup>4</sup> Almost all this scholarship has pursued one or another of three goals. (1) Most of the work has focussed upon very narrow portions of the text and has examined these parts for themselves or in correlation with other documents, sometimes venturing hypotheses about the authorship of the text as a whole on the basis of this very partial evidence. Given the state of our knowledge—until very recently, 24 discontinuous chunks of text—this approach is quite understandable; yet it has been disheartening to see various scholars identifying the Derveni author on the basis of individual passages now as a literary critic, now as a linguist, now as a philosopher, now as a mystic, now as an Orphic, now as an anti-Orphic, now as a Heraclitean, now as a Derridean. (2) Another line of scholarship, going back above all to a seminal article by Walter Burkert,<sup>5</sup> has set itself the task of working out the physical system which the Derveni author presupposes in his allegorical interpretation of the Orphic theogony. The result has been a clear delineation of an eclectic cosmology combining in a new and highly unusual way a number of elements already familiar from Anaxagoras, Diogenes of Apollonia, and other Presocratic thinkers. A single god, whose purposive intelligence is identified with air, creates the world out of an original chaotic mixture by separating out from it some of the element of fire, which in its original abundance had prevented cosmogony by heating things up too much and thereby jumbling them together, and concentrates this excess fire mostly in the sun, and partly also in the stars; this god then causes the remaining elements of things, which take the form of tiny particles, to knock against one another until like gradually finds its way to like and combines with it harmoniously so that the larger and more unified composite beings that form the components of the universe we know can come into existence. (3) Finally, a third approach, to which Martin West has made fundamental contributions,<sup>6</sup> has tried to tease out, from the author's citations and interpretations on the one hand, and from ancient reports about Orphic theogonies on the other hand, the outlines of the Orphic hymn which the Derveni commentator presupposes, transmits, and perverts. Although the details remain controversial, the poem probably began by ordering the profane to close their doors and then went on to recount several generations of divine conflict: it seems to have begun by telling how Zeus, following the oracular advice of his nurse the Night, took over the rule from his father Kronos and swallowed the firstborn god, Protogonos, and with him the rest of the universe; it then appears to have supplied in a flashback other familiar stages of Orphic theogonies, Ouranos, the son of Night, as the first king, Kronos who

<sup>4</sup> The bibliography of studies on the papyrus compiled by M.S. Funghi and included in A. Laks and G.W. Most (ed.), *Studies in the Derveni papyrus* (Oxford 1997) 175-85, only goes up to 1995 and already lists well over 150 items.

<sup>5</sup> W. Burkert, 'Orpheus und die Vorsokratiker. Bemerkungen zum Derveni-Papyrus und zur pythagoreischen Zahlenlehre', *AuA* 14 (1968) 93-114, here 93-102; see now also especially A. Laks, 'Between religion and philosophy: the function of allegory in the Derveni papyrus', *Phronesis* 42 (1997).

<sup>6</sup> M.L. West, *The Orphic poems* (Oxford 1983) 68-115; see also e.g. L. Brisson, *Orphée: Poèmes magiques et cosmologiques* (Paris 1993), 57-63, 162-3, and *Orphée et l'Orphisme dans l'Antiquité gréco-romaine* (Aldershot-Brookfield 1995).

succeeded him and did a great deed to him, presumably castration, to be followed by prudent Zeus, associated with Metis; then the poem seems to have mentioned the earth, the ocean, the moon, and the stars, presumably created when Zeus regurgitated them; the extant commentary breaks off with Zeus' desire to unite in sexual intercourse with his mother Rhea.

The scholars I have named, as well as the many I have not, have made indispensable contributions to our understanding of the Derveni papyrus. But the focus of previous scholarship upon problems of detail, upon the commentator's physics, and upon the Orphic theogony has led to a relative neglect of another, no less fundamental aspect of the papyrus: namely the continuity and integrity of the Derveni text itself. What is the argument of the Derveni papyrus? How do its parts cohere? How are we to understand the over-all structure and ultimate purpose of its allegorical exegesis?

A new and more solid foundation for seeking an answer to these questions has now been provided by K. Tsantsanoglou's edition of the first seven columns of the papyrus in a volume which André Laks and I have edited on the basis of a symposium on the Derveni papyrus he and I organized at Princeton University in 1993.<sup>7</sup> Of these columns, some had already been known in part (though their sequence and their relation to the other columns were uncertain), others were quite new; since no other columns have survived and since the order of these new columns seems to be no less certain than that of the others, it is now possible to renumber definitively the surviving columns of the papyrus. On the basis of this edition and of the various transcriptions available, Laks and I prepared a provisional translation of the whole text which Tsantsanoglou then checked against his reading of the papyrus from beginning to end.<sup>8</sup> This translation provides the first complete and authorized basis available for work on the papyrus. Of course it is not able, and makes no claim, to take the place of the truly critical *editio princeps* whose appearance will hopefully soon render it obsolete; but for the time being it is the only—and, we hope, a reliable—foundation for research.

It is on this basis that the present article attempts to deal with these larger questions. It discusses them in three steps which increase both in concreteness and in speculativeness.

## II. RELIGION AND SCIENCE

Burkert's influential article established the terms within which many scholars have understood the Derveni papyrus since it appeared in 1968. He saw the Derveni text as a document which testifies to the development of Greek thought from *mythos* to *logos*: by allegorizing a theogonic poem in terms of Presocratic philosophy, the author ends up demonstrating in our eyes not the identity of the two systems, which is what he apparently was trying to establish, but instead precisely their difference; the very lengths to which he is forced to go in order to try to reconcile mythic expression with philosophical content prove instead the incompatibility between them. In Burkert's words, 'Damit zeigt unser Text mit unerwarteter Klarheit und Unmittelbarkeit den Abstand der orphischen Theogonie von der 'vorsokratischen' Interpretation; es ist nichts weniger als der Abstand des Mythos von der Naturphilosophie, der hier fassbar wird. Nur durch gewaltsame Allegorese kann unser Autor das Orphische seinem 'vorsokratischen' Weltverständnis adaptieren.'<sup>9</sup>

Now it cannot be denied that there are obvious differences between a discourse which operates with individual named gods like Zeus, Kronos, and Rhea who interact in terms of

<sup>7</sup> K. Tsantsanoglou, 'The first columns of the Derveni papyrus and their religious significance', in Laks and Most, *op. cit.*, 93 ff.

<sup>8</sup> A. Laks and G.W. Most, 'A provisional translation of the Derveni papyrus', *ibid.*, 9-22.

<sup>9</sup> Burkert, *op. cit.*, 101.

intentional actions like castration and rape on the one hand, and one which deploys impersonal elements like air, heat, sun, and moon and has them affect one another by such mechanical processes as striking, separation, and concentration on the other: the former seems to fulfill all the criteria of a mythical narrative, the latter looks like a paradigmatic example of the mechanization of the world picture.<sup>10</sup> Yet Burkert's conception is too general, or too all-encompassing, to be entirely satisfactory. It tends to underemphasize the elements of *logos* in the Orphic poem and those of *mythos* in this Presocratic physical theory. More importantly, it is not easy to assess the intentions and self-understanding of the Derveni author in these terms. Did he believe in Orpheus or in philosophy? If he believed in both, then in what ways and with what differences? Was he quite unaware of the absurdity of his allegorical interpretation? Did he not recognize the contrast between the seemingly mechanical regularity of his physics and the apparently capricious irrationality of his allegorical method? And how did he succeed in convincing not only himself, but also at least one ancient reader?

One place to turn in order to find out about the physiognomy of the Derveni author is his own text. What does the author tell us about himself? In col. 5,<sup>11</sup> we read, 'they consult an oracle ... for them, we go into the oracular shrine in order to ask, on behalf of those seeking oracular answers.' The first person plural *πῶριμεν* leaves no doubt: the author is a religious expert, one member of a recognizable class of professionals to whom non-professionals turn when they seek advice from religious oracles.<sup>12</sup> As such, he can be distinguished with certainty from the members of several other categories: first, according to this very passage, from the lay members who belong to the same religious group as he does and who recognize his authority; second, as is made clear from col. 20, from two kinds of competing religious professionals to whom his attitude is clearly negative, on the one hand those responsible for holy rites in the cities (presumably mysteries) and on the other individuals who make a craft of holy rites and charge clients money for their expertise (presumably the sort of wandering priests about whom Heraclitus and Plato complain).<sup>13</sup> Beyond this, I would make two further guesses concerning his professional identity: first, his allusion in the very next line of this same col. 5 to dreams, as something which ought to convince the doubtful, may suggest that he himself combines oracular expertise with the closely associated activity of interpreting people's dreams (if so, then his interpretation of the Orphic poem may well represent his application of the techniques of dream analysis to a written text); and his references in col. 6 in the third person plural to the funeral rites performed by *magoi* (who presumably figure here as representatives not of Persian but of Greek religion) probably indicate that, though he himself has respect for the *magoi*'s practices, he nonetheless does not consider himself one.

At any rate, the Derveni author, as a reader who has access to a poem ascribed to Orpheus and has no doubts concerning its truthfulness, clearly may be described as an Orphic and stands

<sup>10</sup> See E.J. Dijksterhuis, *The mechanization of the world picture: Pythagoras to Newton*, trans. C. Dikshoorn (Princeton 1986).

<sup>11</sup> Here and throughout I follow the new numbering of the columns established in Laks and Most, *op. cit.*; the previous numbering can be obtained by subtracting four.

<sup>12</sup> The first-person plural might, of course, in another context, be universalizing, and refer to something all people do. But here this interpretation seems to be excluded by the words τῶν μαντευομένων ἕνεκεν (col. 5.5), which refer most naturally to the people on whose behalf the speaker goes into the shrine; *cf.* also perhaps αὐτοῖς (col. 5.4), which may be masculine.

<sup>13</sup> Heraclitus 22 B 14 DK, Plato *Rep.* 2.364e-365a. The latter passage is similar to the Derveni text in associating those who offer rites to cities and those who offer them to individuals, but differs from it in not drawing the same contrast between the two groups. Presumably, the Derveni author differs from the former by not becoming involved in city religious institutions and thinks he differs from the latter by knowing the truth (and perhaps also by not charging money). In any case, the clients of these other experts are also, for the Derveni author, potential readers, followers, and perhaps customers: shrewdly, he expresses pity for them, not contempt.

in contrast to those profane humans, βέβηλοι, whom Orpheus' poem excludes at its very threshold (col. 7.9-10); but on the other hand, as a man who distinguishes the truth that he himself recognizes within Orpheus' poetry from the misunderstandings which characterize other people's misreadings of that same poem, he claims a special and restrictive position within Orphism and stands in contrast to other people who would surely consider themselves Orphics, just as he would, but whom he would nevertheless criticize as being deficient Orphics because they do not share his own doctrine. Thus Orpheus sings only for 'those who are pure in hearing' (col. 7.11); but purity is evidently only a necessary, and not a sufficient ground for understanding, for even those for whom he sings are often said to misunderstand his words (cols. 8, 9, 18, 23). Considering the Derveni author's evident erudition, intelligence, and ambition, as well as his decision to publish his views on Orpheus and thereby to make them known at least within the limited circle of other people who consider themselves Orphics,<sup>14</sup> we may summarize this evidence by postulating that he is, or would like to be, the leader of a particular grouping or sect within Orphism which considers itself Orphic and stands in opposition to non-Orphics, but at the same time distinguishes itself by its doctrine from other Orphic groups.

But if this is so, what is the author's attitude to the philosophical doctrine in terms of which he interprets Orpheus' poem? If he is an Orphic, why does he not simply accept the words of the poem at their face value? Is he trying to justify Orpheus in terms of Presocratic physics, or Presocratic physics in terms of Orpheus?

One way to approach an answer to these questions would be to inquire into the structure and motivations of an apparently parallel modern phenomenon which may seem more familiar to us because it is contemporary. Consider the following two texts:

*Text A:* 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth ... And God said, Let there be light: and there was light ... And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day ... And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.'<sup>15</sup>

*Text B:* 'The age of the universe is given for  $H_0^{-1} \approx 13 \times 10^9$  years as  $t_0 = 2/3 H_0^{-1} \approx 9 \times 10^9$  years. This is known as the *Einstein-deSitter model*.'<sup>16</sup>

Both texts seem to speak in terms of familiar units of time; but on the face of it, they seem to deploy very different conceptions of such units. If it seems unlikely that 365 of God's days would make one of Einstein-deSitter's years, then there seems to be a discrepancy in the way these two texts are making use of these temporal terms. What strategies can be adopted to deal with this apparent discrepancy?

One strategy—let us call it 'fundamentalist'—would insist that the Bible is right and modern physics is wrong. Various versions of such a strategy could be distinguished from one another. For example, a more enlightened version might point out that even physics works only with hypotheses, that the Einstein-deSitter model is not shared by all physicists, that after Einstein the question of the length of units of time cannot be posed in such a way as though we were dealing with absolute quantities, and so on. A less enlightened version would simply declare that the physicists are mistaken or misled and would rely upon the literal truth of the revealed word

<sup>14</sup> D. Obbink has recognized an apparent quotation from the Derveni author, transmitted to Philodemus by Philochorus: see D. Obbink, 'A quotation of the Derveni papyrus in Philodemus' *On Piety*', *CronErc* 24 (1994) 1-39.

<sup>15</sup> Gen. 1.1, 3, 5, 2.2.

<sup>16</sup> S. Weinberg, *Gravitation and cosmology* (New York 1972) 483. I owe this reference to H.-G. Dosch.

of the Holy Scripture.

A second strategy would claim that modern physics is right and the Bible is wrong. A more historicist version might argue in defence of the Biblical account that its authors lived in primitive times and did the best they could with the conceptual means at their disposal; a less conciliatory version would simply assert that religion is always wrong and science always right. Let us call this second strategy 'scientifistic.'

A third strategy, one of compromise, would try to claim that, in some important way, both the Bible and modern physics are right. One approach, within this third strategy, would be to operate in terms of categories or levels of reality: e.g., the Bible describes spiritual reality and physics material reality, so that any discrepancy between them is only apparent, inasmuch as the objects each discourse describes are different from one another and hence claims made about them cannot really contradict one another. A different approach, within this same third strategy, would also work with different levels, but this time not levels of reality, but levels of textuality. It would attempt to interpret the words of the Bible in such a way that, although on their apparent meaning there was a discrepancy between scripture and science, on a different, deeper, less obvious level the message of the Bible would be precisely identical with that of modern physics. It might point out that the word for 'day' in the Hebrew Bible is ambiguous, undeniably referring not only to our quotidian 24-hour units of time but also, in such phrases as 'the day of Jahweh' in eschatological contexts, to much longer periods of time, stretching far beyond merely human understanding; and it might ask how anyone could be so naive as to try to read the Genesis account in terms of 24-hour days, when it was only on the fourth day that God created the stars, the sun, and the moon. It might well conclude that each of these cosmological days must have lasted far more than our puny human ones. We might apply to this approach a term coined in a different context by Amos Funkenstein, 'secular theology',<sup>17</sup> in order to indicate that it develops as a movement within religion that does not dream of questioning the authority of a sacred text but accepts the challenge of accommodating that text to the most up-to-date doctrines of contemporary secular science. In America, modern representatives of this kind of secular theology fill the air waves with their radio and television broadcasts. My suggestion is that the Derveni author was their ancient colleague.

He firmly believes that both Orpheus' revelation and contemporary physics are true. But that does not mean that he believes they are both true in the same way. For if Orpheus provides the material upon which he applies his exegesis, Presocratic physics gives him the conceptual instruments which he applies to it. Orpheus is the starting point, but the goal is Presocratic physics—or rather, a Presocratic physics which is identified with Orpheus. If we think of allegoresis as a semi-permeable interpretative membrane across which certain conceptual substances can flow by osmosis from one discursive liquid into another, we should not forget that the osmosis goes in only one direction. In other words, the Derveni author does not explain Presocratic physics in terms of Orpheus, but Orpheus in terms of Presocratic physics. There can be no doubt that Orpheus is his central spiritual authority—but just as little, that he is fully aware that he lives in a world in which science has made enormous progress and physicists have proposed theories which cannot simply be dismissed but instead with which he must in some way come to terms. He is not a Presocratic, but rather an Orphic who cannot ignore Presocratic thought; one expression for the asymmetry characteristic of all allegoresis is that, on the side of religion, the Derveni author, like his modern American colleagues, acknowledges the authority of only a single author, in his case Orpheus, whereas on the side of physics he has no qualms about combining the not entirely compatible views of a number of different thinkers.

<sup>17</sup> See A. Funkenstein, *Theology and the scientific imagination from the late Middle Ages to the XVIIIth century* (Princeton 1986). I owe this reference to A. Laks.

It is at this level, in the pressure exerted upon him by a world which has become permeated by a mechanical physics, a pressure measurable in his response to it, that we may perhaps best understand that the world he lives in has indeed experienced some kind of shift from *mythos* to *logos*.<sup>18</sup>

Before he begins his interpretation, in col. 7, the Derveni author prefixes a statement of exegetical principle: ‘... a hymn saying sound and lawful things. For ... with the poem. And the true nature of the words cannot be said even though they are spoken. The poem is an alien one and riddling for human beings. But Orpheus intended by means of it to say not contentious riddles, but rather great things in riddles. Indeed, he is uttering a holy discourse, and from the first all the way to the last word, as he makes clear in the well-chosen verse too: for having bidden them to put doors to their ears he says that he is not legislating for the many ... those who are pure in hearing according to ... in the following ...’ He presupposes, as a pious Orphic, that the content of the hymn must in fact be sound and lawful. But evidently it does not seem to be, that is, it does not seem to correspond to views of the nature of the world accepted on other grounds, by himself and by the people for whom he is writing, as being correct. If this is so, then that can only be because Orpheus has spoken in riddles. The terminology of riddles, *αίνιγματα*, *αίνιγματώδης*, *αίνιγματώδως*, occurs thrice in this column (col. 7.5, 6 bis) and at least twice elsewhere (cols. 9, 13), and is one of the Derveni author’s central interpretative categories. He justifies his own application of it by the fact that Orpheus himself already asserted that he was excluding the profane from the mystery of his theological pronouncement; but in fact he transposes that exclusion of non-Orphics into a second act of exclusion, within the Orphic community, between complete Orphics who understand and deficient Orphics who do not. A riddle uses words that are familiar to convey a meaning that is new, in the sense not that that meaning has never been expressed before but rather that usually that meaning is conveyed by different, equally familiar words—thus the author of the *Rhetoric to Alexander* explains *αίνιγματώδως ἔρμηνεύειν* as *ἐτέρων πραγμάτων ὀνόμασι χρώμενος δηλοῦν τὸ πρόγμα*.<sup>19</sup> Now a poet might choose to speak in riddles for purely eristic reasons, to prove how much cleverer he is than us and other poets by speaking obscurely about trivial matters; and indeed some Greek authors did just that.<sup>20</sup> But Orpheus is holy, and hence the contents of his poems must be the most important of matters, ‘sound and lawful things ... great things’ as the Derveni author says in this column, ‘real things’ as he puts it in column 13—that is, the physical world, than which nothing may seem to be more real and more important.

Why then did not Orpheus choose to tell his believers his message directly rather than in riddles? The Derveni author gives his answer in columns 18, 22, and 23: ‘Orpheus called wisdom *Moirā*. This seemed to him to be the most suitable out of the names that all men have given’ (col. 18); ‘So he named all things in the same way as finely as he could, knowing the nature of men ...’ (col. 22); ‘But he indicates his intention in current and customary expressions’ (col. 23). In other words, Orpheus adapted the medium of his message to the nature of his audience. Rather than speaking of physical matters in physical terms, he made a choice out of the language that ordinary humans already customarily used and selected those words that

<sup>18</sup> Of course, when I say ‘world’ here I do not mean to suggest that the ancient Greek world as a whole had undergone this shift by his time, but rather that his own particular world, that pocket of culture in which the Derveni author lived, had done so. The relative speed of communications and the ease of travel in the more developed countries of our own age should not mislead us into forgetting that, in comparison, ancient culture tended to be much more heterogeneous, atomized, and local in character.

<sup>19</sup> *Rhet. ad Alex.* 35.18; cf. *Arist. Poet.* 22.1458a24–30.

<sup>20</sup> See my ‘Simonides’ ode to Scopas in contexts’, in *Modern critical theory and classical literature*, ed. J.P. Sullivan and I.J.F. de Jong (Leiden, New York and Cologne 1994) 127–52, here p. 127.

seemed to him to be the most appropriate ones. Instead of using rebarbative scientific terminology, he used the words of the people. By putting his language forward as a screen, of course, he ensured that the profane would not understand (col. 25); but at the same time he ended up causing difficulties for initiates as well. Orpheus, to be sure, understood perfectly well himself just what he meant; but his initiates could not help but misunderstand him since they inevitably took his conventional words in their conventional meaning. Only with the Derveni author had the original meaning been rediscovered, only now could the long exile of the true meaning from its proper home be brought to an end.

In the history of modern Protestant Biblical exegesis, this corresponds, in certain regards, to a familiar doctrine of the seventeenth and especially of the eighteenth century, called 'accommodation' and associated above all with Johann Salomo Semler, who taught that, although Jesus and the apostles spoke in the language of the prevalent religion of the Jews, they did not actually believe in it, but had chosen to accommodate themselves to its terminology for pedagogical reasons, in order to make sure that their message was not automatically rejected.<sup>21</sup> This compromising attempt to reconcile the historical specificity of Jesus, which historical criticism had begun to establish, with the traditionally timeless authority of his doctrines, which even in the eighteenth century religion could not yet renounce, had already become obsolete by the early nineteenth century, when Schleiermacher could argue that Jesus really did share the views of his time. If the Derveni author is indeed, to a certain extent, an accommodationist of this sort, then we must attribute to him at least a rudimentary sense of historical change in his own culture, the recognition that at the time in which Orpheus sang men still believed in the traditional gods and that only later, closer to his own time, had the language of physics become established. In other words, he almost becomes a kind of Wilhelm Nestle or Bruno Snell *avant la lettre*, himself convinced that Greek culture had progressed from *mythos* to *logos*.

The techniques used by the Derveni author to restore Orpheus' allegorical poem to its putative physical meaning have been well analysed by other scholars.<sup>22</sup> Hence I shall not rehearse them here, except to point out that all of them—the identification with one another of different meanings within the same word (e.g., ἀρχή as ruling power or as a beginning, col. 8), the identification as fully synonymous of different words with overlapping meanings (e.g., 'kindled' and 'dominated' and 'mixed' are the same, col. 9; 'saying' and 'uttering' and 'teaching' are the same, col. 10), the use of analogies from ordinary life (e.g., col. 9) and of parallels from ancient epic (cols. 12, 26), the exploitation of differences among dialects (col. 22), above all the etymological explanation of names (e.g., Kronos from κρούων νόος, col. 14; Harmony from ἡρμωσε, col. 21)—are widely attested throughout Greek culture and that most of them are traditional, some going back at least to Homer and Hesiod.

Instead, I would like to make a general observation about the Derveni author's allegoresis. Some modern scholars have tended to dismiss him contemptuously as a clumsy fool incapable of understanding the very poem in which he so deeply believed;<sup>23</sup> but those who condemn him in this way may have been led astray by historically quite recent canons of exegetical fidelity and seem not to have fully appreciated him within the terms in which he himself was operating. Of course, within our terms, the Derveni author inflicts violence upon Orpheus' poem: but just

<sup>21</sup> See G. Hornig, *Die Anfänge der historisch-kritischen Theologie* = Forschungen zur systematischen Theologie 8 (Göttingen 1960) ch. 8.

<sup>22</sup> See especially M.J. Edwards, 'Notes on the Derveni commentator', *ZPE* 86 (1991) 203-11; M. Henry, 'The Derveni commentator as literary critic', *TAPA* 116 (1986) 149-64; G. Ricciardelli Apicella, 'Orfismo e interpretazione allegorica', *Bolletino Classico* 3.1 (1980) 116-30; J. Rusten, 'Interim notes on the papyrus from Derveni', *HSCP* 89 (1985) 121-40; West, *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> So most persuasively Rusten, *op. cit.*



as he intends his purpose to be acknowledged as pious, establishing the poem's truthfulness and conformity with the world, so too I would suggest that he also wishes his method to be recognized as ingenious, discovering within familiar words an unsuspected doctrine, by means of widely current interpretative methods applied now in a fresh and original manner to a poem to which they had not been thought to be relevant. No doubt for us he cannot count as a reliable guide to the Orphic poem, precisely because he presupposes its obvious meaning in order to substitute for it a new one, whose existence nobody before him (and very few people after him) ever suspected, but which he arrives at by applying methods whose general validity was so universally accepted that their application in the present case could hardly be contested, however odd the ensuing results. If in col. 26 he tries to make Orpheus' reference to Zeus desiring 'his own' mother mean instead that he desired 'a good' mother, we are likely to dismiss his substitution of ἔδος with ἔδς as simply mistaken; and if, as Martin West has ingeniously suggested, the Derveni author in col. 13 invented out of whole cloth the notion that Zeus swallowed an αἰδοῖον by punctuating at the end of the preceding verse, which had made clear that the word αἰδοῖον here was not in fact a substantive meaning 'genitals' but an adjective meaning 'reverend' and referring to Protogonos,<sup>24</sup> then we are tempted to reject his punctuation as utterly false. But in both cases, and in all the other similar ones, the Derveni author seems to expect his reader to react with a mixture of joyous astonishment, at the news that Orpheus' message is compatible with current science, and of amazed admiration that, despite the obvious meaning of the passages, the Derveni author has been clever enough to succeed in giving them a new meaning in a way that might not command assent but cannot easily be refuted.

There is a kind of wit in the way the Derveni author deals with a traditional text—wit not in the sense of humour, but in that of ingenuity—which the Greeks much appreciated as a way of reactivating old stories and turning them into something new, and which we find in authors as diverse, and as unfunny, as Pindar, Euripides and Palaephatus. If we wish to understand him, we must learn to appreciate his pious wit, put into the service of a secular theology.

### III. PHYSICS AND SALVATION

So far I have been concentrating upon the Derveni author's allegorical interpretation of the Orphic hymn; and for that matter so too has most of the scholarship on this papyrus. There is a contingent reason for this: as it happens, the first columns that were known about for a long time seemed to be in very scrappy condition indeed, whereas shortly after the text starts to make better sense it begins to discuss the Orphic poem and goes on to do so, with the sole exception of col. 20, until its very end. Thus, in the unauthorized transcription published in 1982, the Orphic allegoresis takes up 19 of the 22 numbered columns, lasting from col. 3 to the end—indeed, one enthusiast calculated that the text 'is at least 85% commentary.'<sup>25</sup> This helps to explain why from the beginning the Derveni papyrus has tended to be discussed as though the text preserved upon it were in its essence a commentary on Orphic verses. Thus it was first presented to the world by Kapsomenos in 1963 as 'Ein Kommentar zur orphischen Theogonie',<sup>26</sup> it figures prominently in Pfeiffer's discussion of ancient literary scholarship,<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> West, *op. cit.*, 85-6. To be sure, West's hypothesis remains uncertain and controversial.

<sup>25</sup> Henry, *op. cit.*, 150.

<sup>26</sup> S.G. Kapsomenos, 'Der Papyrus von Derveni. Ein Kommentar zur orphischen Theogonie', *Gnomon* 35 (1963) 222-3.

<sup>27</sup> R. Pfeiffer, *History of classical scholarship. From the beginning to the end of the Hellenistic age* (Oxford 1968) 103 n. 1, 139 n. 7, 237; *Geschichte der klassischen Philologie. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des Hellenismus* (Munich 1978) 132 n. 100, 175 n. 109, 290, 292.

Turner's account of ancient commentaries on literary texts considers it the oldest surviving *hypomnema*;<sup>28</sup> and various scholars have suggested that 'this author is a critic, not a philosopher, and his subject is a poem, not the world'<sup>29</sup> and that 'the Derveni commentator, like the majority of ancient critics, is a practical critic.'<sup>30</sup>

In fact, however, commentary never made up the whole of the papyrus, and since Tsantsanoglou's publication of the first seven columns we are now in a better position to recognize that the exegesis of the Orphic poem instead only occupied one part of a text which discussed other material as well.

If we compare the first six columns of the Derveni papyrus to the twenty that follow, the first thing we notice is an absence and a presence. The first columns do not mention Orpheus, they do not quote poetry, they do not perform allegorical exegesis, and they do not discuss cosmology. On the other hand, they dwell upon funeral rites and phenomena of the Underworld and the afterlife, topics which are entirely lacking in the last twenty columns. The Erinyes are mentioned in cols. 1.7, 2.3, 2.4, and 4.9, the Eumenides in col. 6.9; the Erinyes seem to be identified with souls in col. 2.5, and the Eumenides are certainly asserted to be identical with souls in col. 6.9-10. *Daimones* are also discussed in cols. 3 and 6; it is likely to be they who are called 'servants of the gods' in col. 3.7; in any event it is said in col. 6.3-4 that they get in the way, and if so are enemies to souls. To deal with these ominous figures, a number of propitiatory rites and sacrifices are mentioned: in col. 2.5-8 libations in droplets, honours, a bird, and music; in col. 6.1-11 prayers and sacrifices, the incantation of the *magoi*, a sacrifice by the *magoi*, water and milk poured onto the offerings and also used for libations, innumerable many-knobbed cakes, preliminary sacrifices to the Eumenides by the initiates, and a bird. The two columns which discuss the details of sacrifice are separated by col. 4, which quotes a passage from Heraclitus about the sun and the Erinyes,<sup>31</sup> and by col. 5, which argues that people's fear of the terrors of Hades is due to their ignorance and distrust.

What possible relation can we postulate between two textual sections which are so obviously disparate in subject and in method? It would be a desperate recourse indeed to suggest that we might be dealing with an anthology of different texts which happened to be juxtaposed on the same papyrus rather than with a single continuous one. But what kind of unity can we discern? To be sure, on the most general of levels, we can see a very vague similarity of approach in both sections, one of which explains and thereby justifies ritual practices while the other explains and thereby justifies a sacred text; but it must be admitted that this does not get us very far. To conclude, as one scholar has done, that, for the Derveni author, ritual practices too are just one more kind of text which poses exactly the same kind of challenge to exegesis as does the Orphic hymn,<sup>32</sup> is to impose unhelpfully upon him the very recent and no doubt quite ephemeral notion that everything is a text. Again, even casual

<sup>28</sup> E.G. Turner, *Greek papyri. An introduction* (Oxford 1968) 1, 24, 39, 77; second edition (Oxford 1980) 1, 18, 39, 56, 77, 205.

<sup>29</sup> Edwards, *op. cit.*, 210.

<sup>30</sup> Henry, *op. cit.*, 151.

<sup>31</sup> The Derveni author combines into a single text what had previously been thought to be two separate fragments of Heraclitus, 22 B3 and B 94 DK. Most scholars have taken this to prove that the two passages had originally formed part of a single text and had been separated from one another during the course of their transmission: so e.g. W. Burkert, 'Eraclito B3 e B94 DK', in L. Rossetti (ed.), *Symposium Heracliteum, Chieti 1981*, Vol 1 (Rome 1983) 37-42. This is certainly not impossible. But the possibility should also be borne in mind that the Derveni author has conflated into a single text what lay before him as two separate passages. Consideration of his mode of dealing with the text of Orpheus counsels wariness in relying upon him as a witness for the text of Heraclitus.

<sup>32</sup> Henry, *op. cit.*, 152.

inspection suggests the possible existence of some detailed links between the two parts of the papyrus. For example, oracles and oracular shrines appear both in col. 5 and in col. 11. Above all, the quotation from Heraclitus in col. 4 might seem to be capable of playing a key transitional role by mediating between the two parts of the text: for by combining references to the size of the sun and to the Erinyes this citation points both backwards to the eschatological section, where the Erinyes are named in cols. 1 and 2, and forwards to the cosmological section, where heat and the sun are prominently discussed in cols. 9-10, 13-16, and 25, and where the size of the moon is at issue in col. 25. But in the absence of any explanation of the author's conception of the relation between these two sections, it would be very hard indeed to orient and interpret even such suggestive juxtapositions as these.

Fortunately, the Derveni author does provide just such an explanation on his own and indicates to us explicitly what he intended the exact relation between the two parts of his text to be. He does this in col. 5, the same column as the one in which he identifies himself as a religious expert who goes into shrines in order to obtain oracles for other people. The column as a whole reads as follows: '... consulting an oracle ... they consult an oracle ... for them, we go into the oracular shrine in order to ask, on behalf of those seeking oracular answers, if it is right .... the terrors of Hades, why are they distrustful? Not understanding dreams, nor any of the other real things, on the basis of what kinds of examples would they have trust? For overcome both by fault and by something else, pleasure,<sup>33</sup> they neither know nor trust. For distrust is the same as ignorance. For if they neither know nor understand, it is not possible that they would have trust even seeing ... distrust ... appears ...'.

What is happening here? Evidently this expert is trying to convince distrustful laymen to share with him some specific beliefs concerning the terrors of Hades. He himself has a definite view on this subject, but they do not believe him. They are willing enough to send him into the oracular shrine in order to obtain responses for them, but when it comes to the question of the nature of the afterlife they have no confidence about his own vision and stand in dread of the terrors of Hades. *How* they should be able to believe, the author knows: the truth is in fact transmitted, for those who understand, by the media of dreams (ἐνύπνια) and of other real things (τὰ ἄλλα πράγματα). These should be enough to convince anyone, yet still the people do not believe. *Why* they do not believe, the author knows too: they do not believe because they do not understand; and they do not understand because of a fault that has been committed, by themselves or by someone else (ἁμαρτία), and because of the pleasure to which they are enslaved (ἡδονή).

What is he to do? At first glance, it is tempting to take the question in the middle of the column, 'Not understanding dreams, nor any of the other real things, on the basis of what kinds of examples would they have trust?', as being purely rhetorical: in exasperated frustration, the Derveni author would be exclaiming, 'If they won't understand and believe on the basis of dreams and other real things, then on the basis of what *will* they understand and believe?' and would in fact be implying, 'There is nothing at all on the basis of which they will understand and believe.' But a moment's reflection should suffice to show that such an interpretation is unlikely in the extreme. For the whole text is pervaded by an unquestioning conviction that, though there might well be obstacles in the way of attaining knowledge, it is nonetheless both entirely possible and absolutely imperative that people obtain understanding. For example, the Derveni author thinks that it is understandable, given Orpheus' riddling mode of utterance, that

<sup>33</sup> For this interpretation of the phrase, cf. W.S. Barrett (ed.), *Euripides, Hippolytos* (Oxford 1964) 229-30 *ad* 381-5. A more natural translation would be 'both by fault and by the other pleasure', but it is unclear how fault could be a pleasure and what the other pleasure in question would be. Other suggestions that have been made include 'by sin as well as by pleasure' (Tsantsanoglou) and 'by fault and the rest of pleasure' (Janko).

many people do not grasp his meaning; but he has no doubt that that meaning can be grasped in principle, that he himself has already done so, and that with his help we shall be able to as well. For this author, an ἀνιγμα is not indeterminate or essentially insoluble, but is a riddle to which there is one and only one clear answer—forms of δηλώω occur at least twelve times in the twenty columns of the exegetical part of the papyrus.

So the Derveni author's question in column 5 cannot be rhetorical: it cannot mean that there is nothing at all on the basis of which people could understand and believe, but must instead be a genuine question asking what it is after all on the basis of which people would be able to understand and believe. If that is so, then the way that the papyrus continues after col. 5 can only mean that the answer to that question is: the Orphic hymn, rightly understood. Giving up at least temporarily on the παραδείγματα furnished by dreams and other real things in his attempt to convince the terrified, the Derveni author turns to Orpheus. For after all, real things, τὰ πράγματα, ought to convince them. And what is Orpheus' poem really about? The Derveni author tells us in col. 13: 'he speaks in a riddling form about real things (περὶ πραγμάτων) during the whole poem.' On their own, evidently, τὰ πράγματα cannot convince; but when they are revealed as the real subject of Orpheus' poem and are sanctioned by his authority, they can.

In other words, the Derveni author's cosmological allegoresis is introduced in order to serve the purposes of his eschatological theology. Erinyes, obstructing *daimones*, unjust men who are presumably punished, responsibility or guilt for some misdeed, souls that need to be assuaged, enemies to souls, penalties that must be paid—there is material enough in cols. 1-3 and 6 to scare anyone. How can this expert free his pious but terrified flock from their dread of τὰ ἐν Ἄιδου δεινὰ? His answer is physics, his evidence is Orpheus, his method is allegoresis—and his goal is salvation.

For most of us nowadays, physics and theology are two entirely different kinds of discourse. We find it much easier to think of what distinguishes them than of what they have in common. At some universities, the respective departments are separated by miles; at others, by millenia. But matters were not always so. Isaac Newton, for instance, filled thousands of manuscript pages with theological speculations and Biblical criticism and in his *Principia* defined absolute space and time as God's sensorium. In certain periods of Greek thought too, a doctrine of nature and a doctrine of salvation could come to seem not only not contradictory with one another, but instead mutually compatible and indeed mutually dependent. In Neoplatonism, for example, Iamblichus and Porphyry both claim that the study of mathematics and the natural sciences has a cathartic effect upon the soul, purifying it of grosser occupations and directing it to the higher regions where it belongs;<sup>34</sup> and the treatises by Timaeus of Locrus on the nature of the world and the soul and by Sallustius on the gods and the world both begin with the creation of the cosmos and end with the fate of the soul. So too, at the beginning of the discourse of Hermes Trismegistus entitled the *Poimander* the human speaker tells his divine interlocutor, 'I wish to learn about the things that are, to understand their nature and to know god. How much I want to hear!' (3) and is rewarded for his eagerness by an impressive cosmogonic vision of the creation of the universe out of light, darkness, fire, water, and earth (4-5); he then goes on to inquire into the source of the elements of nature (8) and is finally instructed in the ascetic procedures he must follow in this life if his soul is to attain happiness after his death—whereupon he goes out to convert mankind.<sup>35</sup> My suggestion is that, *mutatis mutandis*,

<sup>34</sup> E.g., Iambl. *De comm. math. sci.* 22, 69.6 ff., and 34, 75.25-76.11 Festa; Porph. *Vita Pyth.* 46-7, 42.3-43.6 Nauck.

<sup>35</sup> I quote from the translation of B.F. Copenhaver, *Hermetica. The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a new English translation, with notes and introduction* (Cambridge 1992) 1.

a soteriological physics of this sort was not only a product of the anxious speculations of late antiquity, but also had venerable precursors in fifth century Greece.

When I speak about physics as a doctrine of spiritual salvation in certain varieties of Presocratic thought I have something quite specific in mind. I do not mean that Presocratic philosophers, in the course of theorizing about everything else, also happened to theorize about theological matters, as Werner Jaeger demonstrated, to no one's surprise, in his 1936 Gifford lectures.<sup>36</sup> Nor am I thinking of the very vague affinities between Orphic and Milesian thought in terms of the problem of the One and the Many which Aryeh Finkelberg pointed out in a recent article.<sup>37</sup> Rather, I am thinking of a specific tradition which relates the questions of the survival of the soul and of its destiny after death to fundamental cosmological principles which organized the creation of the universe at its beginning and continue to determine every event within it to this very day.<sup>38</sup> This is not the place to analyze that tradition in detail, and many aspects of its philosophical interpretation are admittedly obscure and controversial; in particular, although there is widespread agreement about the existence of some sort of link between cosmology and eschatology in a number of these thinkers (which is my only point here), there is no consensus about its precise nature. Nonetheless, a very rough sketch of the outlines of this tradition may help to situate the Derveni author in his context.

Pherecydes of Syros, in the middle of the sixth century, seems to be a transitional figure pointing ahead to this tradition. For his book began its account of the birth and succession of the gods by introducing as his three first principles the transparently naturalistic personifications Zas, Chronos, and Chthoniê; but it went on to proclaim the soul's immortality, to assert that it transmigrated, to describe its descent into Tartarus, and to warn against the consequences in the next world of committing acts of bloodshed in this one.<sup>39</sup> But it is only in the fifth century that this tradition assumes definite shape. At the beginning of the century, Heraclitus taught not only about the Logos that underlies all things, the changes between cosmic fire and the sea and earth which are formed out of it, and the fiery nature of the heavenly bodies, but also claimed that the soul is composed of fire and, if it has been virtuous in this life in ways not always prescribed by conventional religion, does not become water when the body dies but eventually joins that cosmic fire.<sup>40</sup> In the same century, the image of the sixth-century Pythagoras seems to have been transformed by the addition, to an originally shamanistic wonderworker who justified a particular mode of life by appeal to the soul's ultimate fate, of a new set of cosmological, astronomical, and mathematical concerns, in Philolaus and in the tradition of the *mathematikoi* which was opposed to that of the *akousmatikoi* and was ascribed to Hippasus—evidently, for fifth century Pythagoreans, Pythagoras' own soteriological doctrines now needed to be buttressed by scientific views of nature if they were to remain plausible.<sup>41</sup> Whether

<sup>36</sup> W. Jaeger, *The theology of the early Greek philosophers*, trans. E.S. Robinson (Oxford 1947).

<sup>37</sup> A. Finkelberg, 'On the unity of Orphic and Milesian thought', *HThR* 79 (1986) 321-35.

<sup>38</sup> See R. Seaford, 'Immortality, salvation and the elements', *HSCP* 90 (1986) 1-26, especially 4-9 (mysticism in Magna Graecia), 10-12 (Empedocles), 13-14 (Pherecydes), 14-20 (Heraclitus), 20-22 (the Derveni papyrus), and 22 (gold leaf C from Thurioi).

<sup>39</sup> See H.S. Schibli, *Pherecydes of Syros* (Oxford 1990), especially 104-27 on Pherecydes' views on the soul.

<sup>40</sup> Heraclitus 22 B25, 26, 36, 117, 118 DK.

<sup>41</sup> This is one way to interpret the results established conclusively by W. Burkert, *Weisheit und Wissenschaft. Studien zu Pythagoras, Philolaos und Platon* (Nürnberg 1962). To be sure, as Myles Burnyeat points out to me, there is no evidence that Philolaus himself had views on the destiny of the soul; thus C.A. Huffman, *Philolaos of Croton, Pythagorean and Presocratic. A commentary on the fragments and testimonia with interpretive essays* (Cambridge 1993), lists as genuine fragments about the soul only those concerning epistemology and the soul as harmony (307-32) and rejects as spurious those discussing the fate of the soul (402-14). But if we do not presuppose some kind of link between eschatological doctrines on the one hand and cosmological ones on the other, it is hard to see how Philolaus could have claimed, or been thought, to be a Pythagorean.

Parmenides' mystic journey from one world to another one and his comparison of true Being with a globe, both of which have been claimed to have certain affinities with the mysteries,<sup>42</sup> means that we should also ascribe to him definite views about the salvation of the soul is very doubtful. But in Empedocles, only a little later, the existence of some link between cosmology and highly specific doctrines about the purification and fate of human beings is evident.<sup>43</sup> To be sure, until well into this century scholars tended to separate these two kinds of subject matter in Empedocles' thought from one another, assigning one to the *Physika* and the other to the *Katharmoi*, and denying any compatibility between the two—for example, Empedocles' eschatological poem was seen as the work of an older, disappointed exile. But the whole tendency of more recent scholarship has been to try to work out the connections between the two bodies of doctrine,<sup>44</sup> whether or not these formed the content of these two poems, or whether or not these were two separate poems in the first place.<sup>45</sup> In the context of the Derveni papyrus, a special importance accrues to another remarkable papyrus, the Strasburg Empedocles papyrus, from the beginning of the second century AD, probably from Panopolis, a town famous in antiquity for its temples and tombs.<sup>46</sup> This papyrus is of interest here not only because it places one fragment on the prohibition against killing and eating animals, which scholars had always assigned to the *Katharmoi*,<sup>47</sup> squarely into a context of the *Physika*, but above all because the papyrus itself was used to help make a copper crown which presumably came from a tomb and if so would have been placed upon a corpse in order to help secure its owner's happiness after his death. Although the papyrus was folded and pasted in such a way as to be illegible (at least in this world) and although another papyrus used for a comparable funeral crown contains a contract for the sale of a house, it seems to me virtually impossible to resist the notion that, in this case, the presence of Empedocles' poem on nature in this funeral context could hardly have been due to the workings of blind chance. The temptation to view the Strasburg papyrus in this light is made even stronger by the fact that, in three verses on it in which Empedocles referred formulaically to the unification of elements or limbs, the first scribe changed the verb form from a neuter plural participle or third person singular into the first person plural so as to introduce a reference to our own involvement in the process of unification.

With cosmological and eschatological papyri in burial contexts we have come back to Derveni, and it is this tradition to which I would like to assign our author. He is not a literary critic, but rather an Orphic who applies to the text of Orpheus for religious reasons a series of techniques which Greek literary criticism developed and applied to the texts of other authors for pedagogical and hermeneutic reasons. Like the philosophers I have just mentioned, he bases

<sup>42</sup> B. Feyerabend, 'Zur Wegmetaphorik beim Goldblättchen aus Hipponion und dem Proömium des Parmenides', *RhM* 127 (1984) 1-22; M.M. Sassi, 'Parmenide al bivio. Per un'interpretazione del proemio', *PP* 43 (1988) 383-96.

<sup>43</sup> See most recently the ardent discussion in P. Kingsley, *Ancient philosophy, mystery and magic. Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford 1995).

<sup>44</sup> So already C.H. Kahn, 'Religion and natural philosophy in Empedocles' doctrine of the soul', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 42 (1960) 3-35.

<sup>45</sup> This latter issue has been much discussed in recent scholarship. The various positions are well represented by M.R. Wright, *Empedocles. The extant fragments* (New Haven and London 1981); C. Osborne, 'Empedocles Recycled', *CQ* 37 (1987) 24-50; D. Sedley, 'The proems of Empedocles and Lucretius', *GRBS* 30 (1989) 269-96; B. Inwood, *The poem of Empedocles: a text and translation with an Introduction* = Phoenix Suppl. 29 (Toronto 1992).

<sup>46</sup> I am grateful to Dr Oliver Primavesi for discussing this papyrus with me and for showing me in advance of publication his forthcoming book, *Empedokles-Studien. Der Strassburger Papyrus und die indirekte Überlieferung* = Hypomnemata 116 (Göttingen 1997). H.D. Betz reminds me of a further parallel supplied by the circumstances of discovery and the contents of the Leiden cosmogony, *PGM* xiii Preisendanz = *P.Lugd.Bat.* J395(w).

<sup>47</sup> Empedocles 31 B 139 DK.

a view of the soul's fate after death upon the material principles which organize the history and structure of the natural world. But unlike them, he establishes his cosmology not directly, by appeal to observation and argument, but indirectly, by allegoresis of an Orphic hymn. It is precisely by turning the theological hymn into a physical cosmology that he can render it suitable for eschatology: left in theological terms, Orpheus could evidently no longer persuade some people to have confidence about the world to come. In point of fact, Orpheus too had sung not only of the first beginnings of things but also of the creation of human beings from the soot deposited by the incinerated Titans, of the immortality and transmigration of the soul, and of its judgment and punishment below the earth.<sup>48</sup> But by the end of the fifth century, in the eyes of the Derveni author, that very same Orphic message could no longer be justified in mythical terms, but only in physical ones.

The Derveni author repeats Orpheus' fundamental gesture of founding eschatology upon the history of the world; but the times have changed, and he can only remain true to the spirit of his master's project by violating at every verse the evident meaning of the letter of his text. If we are tempted to think of the Derveni author's physical allegoresis as a triumph of *logos* over *mythos* we should not forget that the purpose and justification of that allegoresis seems to have been not so much the understanding of natural phenomena for their own sake as rather an eschatological doctrine of the salvation of the soul.

#### IV. THE FIRE NEXT TIME

Up to this point, the link I have been suggesting between cosmology and eschatology has been purely formal and has not required that we fill out its content by assigning to any particular doctrine the function of establishing this connection. Given how little we know about the text, it would certainly be wise to stop at this point. But (some) philologists rush in where angels fear to tread. Can we make any more detailed guess about just *how* the Derveni author thought his physics might assuage people's dread of the terrors of Hades? I would like briefly to offer, in this third part, a few speculative suggestions on this subject.

What is the Derveni author's idea of what happens to us after death? Col. 6.2-3 speaks twice about δαίμονες ἐμποδῶν, *daimones* getting in the way, and calls them an enemy to souls. Clearly then, the souls are trying to go some place, to attain some thing, and these *daimones* stand in their way, blocking their movement and obstructing their purpose. The same column talks about paying a penalty or being punished, ποινὴν ἀποδιδόντες (col. 6.5); col. 3.8-9 mentions unjust men, ἄνδρες ἄδικοι, and people who bear the guilt or responsibility probably for some crime, αἰτίην ἔχουσι.

Even on the basis of these scanty details we can already recognize that this is an image of the Underworld with which we are familiar. It shares certain fundamental features with the scenario of the Underworld implied or asserted by the celebrated 'Orphic' gold leaves.<sup>49</sup> Let us ignore as irrelevant here the issue whether these documents are to be classified as Orphic or as Bacchic, and consider instead the striking similarities between them and the Derveni text. In the gold leaves too, the soul is in motion: ἐρχομαι is the first word in A1, A2, and A3, ἐρχεται

<sup>48</sup> See especially *OF* 220, 222-4, 292-32 Kern.

<sup>49</sup> For the text and fullest discussion of the gold leaves discovered before 1971, see G. Zuntz, *Persephone. Three essays on religion and thought in Magna Graecia* (Oxford 1971). The more recently discovered gold leaves were first published as follows: G. Pugliese Carratelli, 'Un sepolcro di Hipponion e un nuovo testo orfico', *PP* 29 (1974) 110-26; J. Breslin, *A Greek prayer* (Pasadena CA 1977), cf. R. Merkelbach, 'Ein neues "orphisches" Goldblättchen', *ZPE* 25 (1977) 276; K. Tsantsanoglou and G.M. Parassoglou, 'Two gold lamellae from Thessaly', *Hellenica* 38 (1987) 3-16; J. Freh, 'Una nuova laminella "orfica"', *Eirene* 30 (1994) 183-4; M.W. Dickie, 'The Dionysiac mysteries in Pella', *ZPE* 109 (1995) 81-6; *SEG* 41 (1991) 401.

that of A5 Zuntz (and *cf.* *προλίπηι* in the first line of A4 Zuntz). Where it is trying to arrive at is clearly indicated in the gold leaf from Hipponion (lines 6-7) and the texts Zuntz assigned to group B (B1.4-5, B2.4-5 Zuntz): the fountain that comes from the lake of Mnemosyne. But there are guardians, *φύλακες*, who stand in the way (B1.5, B2.5 Zuntz; Hipponion gold leaf, line 7) and block the soul's access unless it can convince them to let it through by saying just the right words. And here too (A2.4 Zuntz) there is a penalty (*ποινών*)<sup>50</sup> that must be paid on account of unjust deeds, *ἔργων ἔνεκ' οὐτι δικαίων*.

Now, these correspondences might be fortuitous, and it would be no less dangerous to suggest the existence of a single highly detailed scenario behind all these gold leaves as to try to identify such a scenario in its totality and in every particular with the image conveyed so fragmentarily by the Derveni author's text. But we do not have to make either assumption. It is enough if we suppose some degree of affinity between the basic structure and a few details of both kinds of text to establish the possible relevance of the gold leaves as a context for interpreting the Derveni papyrus. Note, for example, the ritual use of milk (A1.9, A4.4 Zuntz;<sup>51</sup> *cf.* Derveni col. 6.6) and of water (B1.1-10, 2.1-9, 3-8.1-2 Zuntz, Hipponion gold leaf lines 2-14; *cf.* Derveni col. 6.6), or the causal role assigned to the Moira (A1.4, A2.5, A3.5 Zuntz), who recurs prominently in the cosmological section of the Derveni text (col. 18). But how are these seeming correspondences to be interpreted?

My suggestion is that the crucial issue is the thirst of the soul after death. In the Hipponion gold leaf, as well as in the two similar fourth-century ones found at Petelia (B1 Zuntz) and Pharsalus (B2 Zuntz) and in the various shorter ones found in Crete (B3-8 Zuntz) and in Thessaly,<sup>52</sup> the whole scenario revolves around the soul's dryness, heat, thirst, and longing for cool, refreshing water. The very first thing it sees in the Underworld is a fountain on the right (B2.1 Zuntz; Hipponion gold leaf, line 2; in B1.1 Zuntz it is on the left), where the souls go down to refresh and cool themselves by drinking (Hipponion gold leaf, line 4). So great is the dead man's thirst that he too is strongly tempted to join them and must be warned strictly against even approaching it (B1.3, B2.3 Zuntz; Hipponion gold leaf, line 5). Instead, he will find in front of it another fountain, from the lake of Memory, flowing with cool water (B1.4-5, B2.4-5 Zuntz; Hipponion gold leaf, lines 6-7). To the guards who try to block his path (B1.5, B2.5 Zuntz; Hipponion gold leaf, lines 7-8) he must say that he is all dried out with thirst and is being destroyed, *δίψαι δ' εἰμὶ ἄυος καὶ ἀπόλλυμαι* (B1.8, B2.7, B3~8.1 Zuntz; Hipponion gold leaf, line 11), and he must ask them to give him cool water flowing from the lake of Memory (B1.8-9, B2.7-9 Zuntz; Hipponion gold leaf, lines 11-12). Only then will they take pity upon him and let him drink from the lake of Memory (B1.10 Zuntz; Hipponion gold leaf, line 14), so that he will be able to walk along the road together with other initiates and Bacchants (Hipponion gold leaf, line 16; *cf.* B1.11 Zuntz).

Now Greece is a thirsty land, but the emphasis here upon dryness is so insistent that it needs to be explained. It is not enough, I think, to suppose that the soul has made a long journey and has arrived with a dry throat, for nowhere do the texts talk about any long journey it made *before* it drank, but only about a long journey it will be able to make *after* it drinks (Hipponion gold leaf, line 16). Rather, I would suggest that what underlies this notion is observation of what actually happens to people's bodies after they die. If they are cremated, as

<sup>50</sup> So too in Pindar *fr.* 133 Snell-Maehler: οἴσι δὲ Φερσεφόνα ποινὴν παλαιοῦ πένθεος | δέξεται...

<sup>51</sup> The references to milk, apparently in an initiatory context, are even more emphatic in lines 3-5 of the two gold leaves from Pelinna. On ritual uses of milk, see now R. Schlesier, 'Das Löwenjunge in der Milch. Zu Alkman, *Fragment* 56 P. [=125 Calamel]', in A. Bierl and P. von Moellendorff with S. Vogt (ed.), *Orchestra. Drama Mythos Bühne* [Festschrift H. Flashar] (Stuttgart and Leipzig 1994) 19-29.

<sup>52</sup> See on this last gold leaf Breslin, *op. cit.*, and Merkelbach, *op. cit.*



at Derveni and in the case of some of the gold leaves, then fire destroys the corpse, reducing it to dry bones and a powdery ash. Even if the body is inhumed, as at Hipponion, the process of warm organic decomposition makes the body lose its moisture to the surrounding air or soil until in the end nothing is left of it except for dry bones.<sup>53</sup> In either case, heat can be viewed not only as a necessary means of transformation of the once living body into a corpse whose soul can leave it behind, but also as a source of pain and discomfort for the soul itself, making it want to refresh itself with cool water.<sup>54</sup>

Now consider the Derveni cosmogony. Its single most bizarre feature is the role it assigns to the sun in the creation of the world. Normally, the sun plays an entirely *positive* role in cosmogonic theories: it provides heat and light and divides the year into seasons; all of these features are indispensable for organic growth. The Derveni author too sees the creation of the sun as a necessary step in the formation of the world, but not only for positive but also for *negative* reasons. According to him, creation could not take place as long as the original excessive heat was dispersed throughout the universe, for the jumbling up and confusion it produced prevented things from coming and staying together. It was only when the directing mind of God concentrated most of this heat into a great mass and removed it, in the form of the sun, from too close a proximity to the earth, that what remained was little enough that it could no longer prevent the atoms from finding their partners and joining with them to form the composite beings we know. Only then could the sun's reduced heat cause things to strike together gently enough that they did not immediately fly apart, but could stick together. In other words, the sun's moderate heat is beneficial, but the excessive heat which existed previously was extremely harmful. This curious view, which could only have occurred to a torrid Greek and which, oddly enough, has close parallels with certain modern scientific theories, is stated most explicitly in col. 9, but clearly formed the main subject of discussion from col. 9 through col. 15. In allegorical terms, Zeus created the sun by swallowing the αἰδοῖον, concentrating what had formerly been diffused everywhere into a single mass in his stomach. If Martin West is right, so great was the importance the Derveni author attached to this idea that he was evidently willing to separate αἰδοῖον off from the preceding verse, where it modified Protogonos, and to take it instead as a substantive.<sup>55</sup> In that case, Zeus swallowing an αἰδοῖον was never in fact part of Orpheus' hymn, but was invented by the Derveni author—but only so that he could immediately reinterpret it as heliogy.

Cosmologically, heat is mastered and overcome by God's wisdom; and as for water, the Derveni author quotes a passage from Orpheus telling how 'rivers and lovely springs' became part of Zeus (col. 16) and identifies Ocean, as air, as being not just some river, but the power of Zeus himself (col. 23).<sup>56</sup> When we die, we will discover, if we have been initiated into the truth of a mystical physics, that that same God can master the heat that afflicts us and is powerful to supply us with the water which we so desperately crave. The God who has taken over strength and the δαίμων from His father (cols. 8-9) will have no difficulty in controlling the δαίμονες who obstruct our course but are in fact servants of the Gods (cols. 3, 6). The Moira that is responsible for our destruction on some of the gold leaves (A1.4, A2.5, A3.5

<sup>53</sup> Homer's description of what happens to the victims of the Sirens is particularly graphic: πολλὰς δ' ἄμφ' ὄστεσφιν θίς | ἀνδρῶν πυθομένων, περὶ δὲ ῥίνοι μινύθουσιν (*Od.* 12.45-46).

<sup>54</sup> If this suggestion is right, then Heraclitus' view, that the soul is fire and that death for it is to turn into water (22 B 36 DK), may be a characteristically idiosyncratic reversal of a familiar Orphic doctrine.

<sup>55</sup> See above, n.24.

<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless it must be acknowledged that water does not play as prominent a role in the surviving fragments of the Derveni allegoresis as one might wish. I presume that it was discussed more fully in passages that have been lost.

Zuntz) is in fact nothing other than Zeus' own wisdom, identified with the air (col. 18). And we learn that the Erinyes too obey Zeus' orders; for as we know from the Heraclitus quotation in col. 4, God has confined the sun within narrow limits and the Erinyes will help make sure that it does not transgress them. In the heavens, the sun stays within its fixed dimensions by the kind will of God; so too He keeps the extra hot matter, which was left over after the sun was created and is disseminated in the stars, from coalescing into another threatening large warm mass (col. 25), and He can permit the moon to transgress its dimensions by waxing and waning,<sup>57</sup> since the moon is made up of material which is not bright and hot but instead bright and cold (col. 25). The Erinyes, 'helpers of Justice' for Heraclitus (col. 4.9), and the *daimones*, 'servants of the gods' (col. 3.7), may seem threatening, but in fact they are under the control of a God whose benevolent intelligence, emphasized throughout the cosmological section, mastered fire once in order to create the cosmos and will surely master fire a second time after our death by giving us the cool water of Memory which will express that intelligence and permit us to partake of it. We need not fear the fire next time.

That is what it seems to say on the Derveni papyrus, and that, I would suggest, is why one pious Greek soldier, facing death at the end of the fourth century BC and deeply worried about what would happen to his soul after his body was cremated (did he feel guilty about a life spent murdering people?), chose to have this text burned with him. In that way, its message of hope would accompany his soul on its wanderings and its cosmological doctrine would help ensure that he would obtain the refreshment and salvation he so desperately needed. For other initiates, the golden verses of Orpheus or of Empedocles were enough by themselves; our soldier, more secular and less ingenuous than they, preferred to take with him on his journey a technical treatise quoting Orpheus' verses and explaining what they really meant. Its author must have intended seriously the philosophical allegoresis by which he rewrote Orpheus' holy words into a discourse which he thought would be more convincing for his doubtful followers; but for all we know, that soldier for his part may have thought that the actual work of salvation would ultimately be performed by the ancient verses of Orpheus which the modern allegoresis cited during its course, and not by the physical doctrines into which it translated them.

We should be grateful to that soldier. It would be agreeable if only we could believe that his hopes were actually fulfilled.

## V. CONCLUSION

No one is more painfully aware than I am how much of the interpretation offered here is speculative, and how far it goes beyond the scant evidence actually supplied by the Derveni papyrus. This article began with one quotation from A.E. Housman, and its readers may well want to apply to it another one, the words with which he concluded his review of Friedrich Marx's edition of Lucilius: 'No editor of these fragments, neither Mueller nor Baehrens, has been so rash and venturesome as Mr Marx; none has such cause to wish that the earth may lie heavy on Herculaneum and that no roll of Lucilius may ever emerge into the light of day.'<sup>58</sup>

But I would suggest that, whether or not the particular details of the hypothetical reconstruction offered here are correct, the direction in which it points, that of trying to interpret the argument and structure of the text as a whole, is well worth pursuing at this point in the history of the scholarship on this remarkable document. And if that reconstruction is indeed right, at least in its general outlines, then it turns out that the miracle by which the God who

<sup>57</sup> Compare ὑπερβάλην and ὑπερβάλλειν in col. 24 with ὑπερβάλλον in the Heraclitus quotation in col. 4.8.

<sup>58</sup> A.E. Housman, *The classical papers*, J. Diggle and F.R.D. Goodyear (eds.), Vol II 1897-1914 (Cambridge 1972) 684 = 'Luciliana [I]', *CQ* 1 (1907) 53-74, here 74.

managed to control cosmic fire also manipulated the funeral pyre at Derveni was either partially botched or else had a malicious side too. We, to be sure, thereby gained fragments of a papyrus whose decipherment and interpretation will continue to fill generations of scholars not only with frustration but also with joy. On the other hand, the soldier who tried to reach the fountain of Memory sometime towards the end of the fourth century BC is not likely to have been very amused when he got there and discovered that fully one third of the most important columns of his philosophical passport had not been properly burned at his pyre and hence were now missing from the spectral text he was carrying with him. For the fact that *we* have these columns means that *he* cannot have had them. Imagine the expression on his face when he realized the practical joke his God had played on him.

GLENN W. MOST

*Heidelberg/Chicago*