

# Orpheus' legend and works

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## Orpheus after HP Blavatsky

### **Orpheus occupied one of four great seats of learning in ancient Egypt.**

Whence the wonderful knowledge of the Egyptian Priests in every department of Science, unless they had it from a still more ancient source? The famous “Four,” the seats of learning in old Egypt, are more historically certain than the beginnings of modern England. It was in the great Theban sanctuary that Pythagoras upon his arrival from India studied the Science of Occult numbers. It was in Memphis that Orpheus popularized his too-abstruse Indian metaphysics for the use of *Magna Grecia*; and thence Thales, and ages later Democritus, obtained all they knew. It is to Saïs that all the honor must be given of the wonderful legislation and the art of ruling people, imparted by its Priests to Lycurgus and Solon, who will both remain objects of admiration for generations to come. And had Plato and Eudoxus never gone to worship at the shrine of Heliopolis, most probably the one would have never astonished future generations with his ethics, nor the other with his wonderful knowledge of mathematics.<sup>1</sup>

### **He brought the Indian Mysteries of Initiation to Greece, nine millennia before Homer and Hesiod.**

We know through Herodotus that the Mysteries were brought from India by Orpheus — a hero far anterior to both Homer and Hesiod. Very little is really known of him, and till very lately Orphic literature, and even the Argonauts, were attributed to Onomacritus, a contemporary of Pisistratus, Solon and Pythagoras — who was credited with their compilation in the present form toward the close of the sixth century B.C. or 800 years after the time of Orpheus. But we are told that in the days of Pausanias there was a sacerdotal family, who, like the Brahmans with the *Vedas*, had committed to memory all the Orphic Hymns, and that they were usually thus transmitted from one generation to another. By placing Orpheus so far back as 1200 B.C., official Science — so careful in her chronology to choose in each case as late a period as possible — admits that the Mysteries, or in other words Occultism dramatized, belong to a still earlier epoch than the Chaldaean and Egyptians.<sup>2</sup>

It has been already stated in *Isis Unveiled*,<sup>3</sup> that so far back as in the days of Aristotle, the great Mysteries had already lost their primitive grandeur and solemnity. Their rites had fallen into desuetude, and they had to a great degree degenerated into mere priestly speculations and had become religious shams. It is useless to state when they first appeared in Europe and Greece, since recognised history may almost be said to begin with Aristotle, everything before him appearing to be in an inextricable chronological confusion. Suffice it to say, that in Egypt the Mysteries had been known since the days of Menes, and that the Greeks received them only when Orpheus introduced them from India.

[Continued overleaf.]

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<sup>1</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE ORIGIN OF THE MYSTERIES) XIV p. 254. See Laurens' *Essais Historiques* . . . for further information as to the worldwide, universal knowledge of the Egyptian Priests.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* (TRACES OF THE MYSTERIES) XIV p. 293

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, I, 15.



In an article “Was writing known before Pānini?”<sup>4</sup> it is stated that the Pāndus had acquired universal dominion and had taught the “sacrificial” Mysteries to other races as far back as 3,300 B.C. Indeed, when Orpheus, the son of Apollo or Helios, received from his father the *phorminx* — the seven-stringed lyre, symbolical of the sevenfold mystery of Initiation — these Mysteries were already hoary with age in Central Asia and India. According to Herodotus it was Orpheus who brought them from India, and Orpheus is far anterior to Homer and Hesiod. Thus even in the days of Aristotle few were the true Adepts left in Europe and even in Egypt. The heirs of those who had been dispersed by the conquering swords of various invaders of old Egypt had been dispersed in their turn. As 8,000 or 9,000 years earlier the stream of knowledge had been slowly running down from the tablelands of Central Asia into India and towards Europe and Northern Africa, so about 500 years B.C. it had begun to flow backward to its old home and birthplace. During the two thousand subsequent years the knowledge of the existence of great Adepts nearly died out in Europe. Nevertheless, in some secret places the Mysteries were still enacted in all their primitive purity. The “Sun of Righteousness” still blazed high on *the midnight sky*; and, while darkness was upon the face of the profane world, there was the eternal light in the Adyta on the nights of Initiation. The *true* Mysteries were never made public. Eleusinia and Agrae for the multitudes; the God *Ευβουλή*, “of the good counsel,” the great Orphic Deity for the neophyte.<sup>5</sup>

Wherever Bacchus was worshipped there was a tradition of Nysa,<sup>6</sup> and a cave where he was reared. Outside Greece, Bacchus was the all-powerful “Zagreus, the highest of Gods,” in whose service was Orpheus, the founder of the Mysteries.<sup>7</sup>

### **Pythagoras was initiated to the Orphic Mysteries and Plato received a perfect knowledge of them.**

The Neo-Platonic School of Alexandria founded by Ammonius — the prototype proposed for the Theosophical Society — taught Theurgy and Magic, as much as they were taught in the days of Pythagoras, and by others far earlier than his period. For Proclus says that the doctrines of Orpheus, who was an Indian and came from India, were the origin of the systems afterwards promulgated.

What Orpheus delivered in hidden allegories, Pythagoras learned when he was initiated into the Orphic mysteries; and Plato next received a perfect knowledge of them from Orphic and Pythagorean writings.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A curious question to start and to deny, when it is well-known even to the Orientalists that, to take but one case, there is Yaska, who was a predecessor of Pānini and his work still exists; there are seventeen writers of *Nirukta* (glossary) known to have preceded Yaska. [For this article see *Five Years of Theosophy or B.C.W.*, Vol. V, pp. 294-310. — Boris de Zirkoff.]

<sup>5</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE MYSTERY OF THE “SUN INITIATION”) XIV pp. 269-70; [full text in our Blavatsky Speaks Series”]

<sup>6</sup> Beth-San or Scythopolis in Palestine had that designation; so had a spot on Mount Parnassus. But Diodorus declares that Nysa was between Phoenicia and Egypt; Euripides states that Dionysos came to Greece from India; and Diodorus adds his testimony: “Osiris was brought up in Nysa, in Arabia the Happy; he was the son of Zeus, and was named from his father (nominative Zeus, genitive *Dios*) and the place *Dio-Nysos*” — the Zeus or Jove of Nysa. This identity of name or title is very significant. In Greece Dionysos was second only to Zeus, and Pindar says: “So Father Zeus governs all things, and Bacchus he governs also.” [*Isis Unveiled*, II p. 165.]

<sup>7</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE MYSTERY OF THE “SUN INITIATION”) XIV p. 73; [full text in our Blavatsky Speaks Series”]

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* (POST-CHRISTIAN SUCCESSORS TO THE MYSTERIES) XIV p. 308; [*New Platonism and Alchemy*, p. 18, quoting Proclus.]



## How the Orphic Mysteries were disfigured by the exoteric rites of Bacchus.

The *nazars* or prophets, as well as the Nazarenes, were an anti-Bacchus caste, in so far that, in common with all the initiated prophets, they held to the spirit of the symbolical religions and offered a strong opposition to the idolatrous and exoteric practices of the dead letter. Hence, the frequent stoning of the prophets by the populace, under the leadership of those priests who made a profitable living out of the popular superstitions. Otfried Müller shows how much the Orphic Mysteries differed from the popular rites of Bacchus,<sup>9</sup> although the *Orphikoi* are known to have followed the worship of Bacchus. The system of the purest morality and of a severe asceticism promulgated in the teachings of Orpheus, and so strictly adhered to by his votaries, are incompatible with the lasciviousness and gross immorality of the popular rites. The fable of Aristæus pursuing Eurydice into the woods where a serpent occasions her death,<sup>10</sup> is a very plain allegory, which was in part explained at the earliest times. Aristæus is *brutal power*, pursuing Eurydice, the esoteric doctrine, into the woods where the serpent (emblem of every sun-god, and worshipped under its grosser aspect even by the Jews) kills her; *i.e.*, forces truth to become still more esoteric, and seek shelter in the Underworld, which is not the hell of our theologians. Moreover, the fate of Orpheus, torn to pieces by the Bacchantes, is another allegory to show that the gross and popular rites are always more welcome than divine but simple truth, and proves the great difference that must have existed between the esoteric and the popular worship. As the poems of both Orpheus and Musæus were said to have been lost since the earliest ages, so that neither Plato nor Aristotle recognized anything authentic in the poems extant in their time, it is difficult to say with precision what constituted their peculiar rites. Still we have the oral tradition, and every inference to draw therefrom; and this tradition points to Orpheus as having brought his doctrines from India. As one whose religion was that of the oldest Magians — hence that to which belonged the initiates of all countries, beginning with Moses, the “Sons of the Prophets,” and the ascetic *nazars* (who must not be confounded with those against whom thundered Hosea and other prophets) [and ending with] the Essenes. This latter sect were Pythagoreans before they rather degenerated rather than perfected in their system by the Buddhist missionaries, who, Pliny tells us, established themselves on the shores of the Dead Sea, ages before his time, “*per seculorum millia.*”<sup>11</sup> But if, on the one hand, these Buddhist monks were the first to establish monastic communities and inculcate the strict observance of dogmatic conventional rule, on the other, they were also the first to enforce and popularize those stern virtues so exemplified by Śakyamuni, and which were previously exercised only in isolated cases of well-known philosophers and their followers; virtues preached two or three centuries later by Jesus, practiced by a few Christian ascetics, gradually abandoned, and even entirely forgotten by the Christian Church.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> K.O. Müller, *A History of the Literature of Ancient Greece*, pp. 230-40

<sup>10</sup> [Virgil, *Georgica*, VI, 282 *et seq.*]

<sup>11</sup> [*i.e.*, for thousands of ages: Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, V, xv.]

<sup>12</sup> *Isis Unveiled*, II pp. 129-30



**Dionysos is god Dis from Mount Nys in India.  
Bacchus, crowned with kissos or ivy, is Krishna.  
Orpheus is orphnos or a tawny-coloured Hindu.**

Bacchus, as Dionysos, is of Indian origin. Cicero mentions him as a son of Thyōnē and Nisus.<sup>13</sup> Διονυσος means the god Dis from Mount Nys in India. Bacchus, crowned with ivy, or *kissos*, is Krishna, one of whose names was *Kissen*. Dionysos is pre-eminently the deity on whom were centred all the hopes for future life; in short, he was the god who was expected to *liberate the souls of men* from their prisons of flesh. Orpheus, the poet-Argonaut, is also said to have come on earth to purify the religion of its gross, and terrestrial anthropomorphism; he abolished human sacrifice and instituted a mystic theology based on pure spirituality. Cicero calls Orpheus a son of Bacchus. It is strange that both seem to have originally come from India. At least, as Dionysos-Zagreus, Bacchus is of undoubted Hindu origin. Some writers deriving a curious analogy between the name of Orpheus and an old Greek term, *ορφνός*, *dark or tawny-colored*, make him Hindu by connecting the term with his dusky Hindu complexion. See Voss, Heyne and Schneider on the Argonauts.<sup>14</sup>

**They all descended to Hell and ascended the third day.**

The initiatory [post mortem descend into Hell] rite typified a descent into the underworld. Bacchus, Herakles, Orpheus, and Asklepius all descended into hell and ascended thence the third day.<sup>15</sup>

**Facts and clues underlying the lives of Initiated Adepts.**

Take an instance. The legends — for they are *all* legends for exoteric purposes, whatever may be the denials in one case — of the lives of Krishna, Hercules, Pythagoras, Buddha, Jesus, Apollonius, Chaitanya. On the worldly plane, their biographies, if written by one outside the circle, would differ greatly from what we read of them in the narratives that are preserved of their mystic lives. Nevertheless, however much masked and hidden from profane gaze, the chief features of such lives will all be found there in common. Each of those characters is represented as a divinely begotten *Soter* (Savior), a title bestowed on deities, great kings and heroes; everyone of them, whether at their birth or afterwards, is searched for, and threatened with death (yet never killed) by an opposing power (the world of Matter and Illusion), whether it be called a king Kamsa, king Herod, or king Māra (the Evil Power). They are all tempted, persecuted and finally said to have been murdered at the end of the rite of Initiation, *i.e.*, in their *physical* personalities, of which they are supposed to have been rid for ever after *spiritual* “resurrection” or “birth.” And having thus come to an end by this supposed violent death, they all descend to the Nether World, the Pit or Hell — the Kingdom of Temptation, Lust and Matter, therefore of Darkness, whence returning, having overcome the “Chrēst-condition,” they are glorified and become “Gods.”

It is not in the course of their everyday life, then, that the great similarity is to be sought, but in their inner state and in the most important events of their career as

<sup>13</sup> [De natura deorum, III, xxiii.]

<sup>14</sup> *Isis Unveiled*, II p. 560 fn.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* II p. 514 fn.



religious teachers. All this is connected with, and built upon, an astronomical basis, which serves, at the same time, as a foundation for the representation of the degrees and trials of Initiation: descent into the Kingdom of Darkness and Matter, *for the last time*, to emerge therefrom as “Suns of Righteousness,” is the most important of these and, therefore, is found in the history of all the *Soters* — from Orpheus and Hercules, down to Krishna and Christ. Says Euripides:

Heracles, who has gone out from the chambers of earth  
Leaving the nether home of Pluto.<sup>16</sup>

And Virgil writes:

At Thee the Stygian lakes trembled; Thee the janitor of Orcus  
Feared . . . Thee not even Typhon frightened . . .  
Hail, *true son of Jove*, glory added to the Gods.<sup>17</sup>

Orpheus seeks, in the kingdom of Pluto, Eurydice, his lost Soul; Krishna goes down into the infernal regions and rescues therefrom his six brothers, he being the seventh Principle; a transparent allegory of his becoming a “perfect Initiate,” the whole of the six Principles merging into the seventh. Jesus is made to descend into the kingdom of Satan to save the soul of Adam, or the symbol of material physical humanity.<sup>18</sup>

### **Why Initiates were persecuted, tortured, exiled, executed, murdered?**

The second statement of Plato confirms the view that the Mysteries of the Ancients were identical with the Initiations practised even now among the Buddhist and the Hindu Adepts. The higher visions, the most truthful, were produced through a regular discipline of gradual Initiations, and the development of psychical powers. In Europe and Egypt the *Mystae* were brought into close union with those whom Proclus calls “mystical natures,” “resplendent Gods,” because, as Plato says:

[We] were ourselves pure and immaculate, being liberated from this surrounding vestment, which we denominate body, and to which we are now bound like an oyster to its shell.<sup>19</sup>

As to the East,

The doctrine of planetary and terrestrial *Pitris* was revealed *entirely* in ancient India, as well as now, only at the last moment of initiation, and to the adepts of superior degrees.<sup>20</sup>

The word *Pitris* may now be explained and something else added. In India the chela of the third degree of Initiation has two Gurus: One, the living Adept; the other the disembodied and glorified Mahātma, who remains the adviser or instructor of even the high Adepts. Few are the accepted chelas who even see their living Master, their Guru, till the day and hour of their final and for ever binding vow. It is this that was

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<sup>16</sup> Euripides, *The Madness of Herakles*, 806-8

<sup>17</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, VIII, 296-301

<sup>18</sup> Blavatsky *Collected Writings*, (FACTS UNDERLYING ADEPT BIOGRAPHIES) XIV pp. 140-42

<sup>19</sup> *Phaedrus* 250c, quoted by Taylor, p. 64

<sup>20</sup> *Isis Unveiled*, II, p. 114



meant in *Isis Unveiled*, when it was stated that few of the *fakirs* (the word *chela* being unknown to Europe and America in those days), however

Pure, and honest, and self-devoted, have yet ever seen the astral form of a purely *human pitar* (an ancestor or father), otherwise than at the solemn moment of their first and last initiation. It is in the presence of his instructor, the Guru, and just before the *vatu-fakir* [the just initiated *chela*] is despatched into the world of the living, with his seven-knotted bamboo wand for all protection, that he is suddenly placed face to face with the unknown PRESENCE [of his Pitar or Father, the glorified invisible Master, or disembodied Mahātma] . He sees it, and falls prostrate at the feet of the evanescent form, but is not entrusted with the great secret of its evocation, for it is the supreme mystery of the holy syllable.<sup>21</sup>

The Initiate, says Éliphas Lévi, *knows*; therefore, “he dares all and keeps silent.” Says the great French Kabbalist:

You may see him often sad, never discouraged or desperate; often poor, never humbled or wretched; often persecuted, never cowed down or vanquished. For he remembers the widowhood and the murder of Orpheus, the exile and solitary death of Moses, the martyrdom of the prophets, the tortures of Apollonius, the Cross of the savior. He knows in what forlorn state died Agrippa, whose memory is slandered to this day; he knows the trials that broke down the great Paracelsus, and all that Raymond Lully had to suffer before he arrived at a bloody death. He remembers Swedenborg having to feign insanity, and losing even his reason before his knowledge was forgiven to him; St. Martin, who had to hide himself all his life; Cagliostro, who died forsaken in the cells of the Inquisition;<sup>22</sup> Cazotte, who perished on the guillotine. Successor of so many victims, he dares, nevertheless, but understands the more the necessity to keep silent.<sup>23</sup>

### **Enoch-Orpheus is the possessor of the phorminx, the 7-stringed lyre.**

In Greece [Enoch<sup>24</sup>] was called Orpheus, and thus changed his name with every nation. The number Seven being attached to, and connected with, each of those primitive Initiators,<sup>25</sup> as well as the number 365, of the days in the year, astronomically, it identifies the mission, character, and the sacred office of all those men, but certainly not their personalities. Enoch is the *seventh* Patriarch; Orpheus is the possessor of the *phorminx*, the 7-stringed lyre, which is the seven-fold mystery of initiation. Thoth, with the seven-rayed Solar Discus on his head, travels in the Solar boat, the 365 de-

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<sup>21</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> This is false, and the Abbé Constant (Éliphas Lévi) *knew* it was so. Why did he promulgate the untruth? [See *B.C.W.*, Vol. XII, pp. 88; 727-30.]

<sup>23</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE OBJECT OF THE MYSTERIES) XIV pp. 277-78. And quoting *Dogme et Rituel de la haute magie*, I pp. 219-20. (Paris, G. Baillière, 1861.) [See p. 90 of English tr. by Waite — Boris de Zirkoff.]

<sup>24</sup> [“Enoichion (*Gr.*) *Lit.*, the ‘inner Eye’; the ‘Seer,’ a reference to the third *inner*, or Spiritual Eye, the true name for Enoch disfigured from *Chanoch*.” *Theosophical Glossary*. Also cf. *Ενρηχος* is sounding within, of wind-instruments; (*opp.* *εγχορδος*). *Liddell & Scott*]

<sup>25</sup> Hanoch, or Enoch means the “Initiator” and “teacher,” as well as the “Son of Man,” *Enos* (*vide Genesis* iv, 26), esoterically.



grees, jumping out every fourth (leap) year for one day. Finally, Thoth-Lunus is the septenary.<sup>26</sup>

### **He is one of seven Primordial Creators, a branch of the Tree of Salvation grown out of One Seed.**

The *Poimandrēs* of our museums and libraries is an abridgement of one of the Books of Thoth, by a Platonist of Alexandria. In the Third Century it was remodelled after old Hebrew and Phoenician MSS. By a Jewish Kabbalist, and called the *Genesis of Enoch*. But even its disfigured remnants show how closely its text agrees with the Archaic Doctrine, as is shown in the creation of the Seven Creators and *seven primitive men*. As to Enoch, Thoth or Hermes, Orpheus and Kadmos, these are all generic names, branches and offshoots of the seven primordial sages (incarnated Dhyāni-Chohans or Devas, in *illusivē*, not mortal bodies) who taught Humanity all it knew, and whose earliest disciples assumed their master's names. This custom passed from the Fourth to the Fifth Race. Hence the sameness of the traditions about Hermes (of whom Egyptologists count five) Enoch, etc., they are all inventors of letters; none of them dies but still lives, and they are the first Initiators into, and Founders of the Mysteries.<sup>27</sup>

### **He called Nature “resourceful mother.”**

“Synesius mentions books of stone which he found in the temple of Memphis, on [one of] which was engraved the following sentence:

‘One *nature* delights in another, one nature overcomes another, one nature overrules another, and the whole of them are *one*’.

The inherent restlessness of matter is embodied in the saying of Hermes:

‘Action is the life of Ptah’;

and Orpheus calls nature *πολυμήχανος μήτηρ*,

‘the mother that makes many things,’

or the ingenious, the contriving, the inventive mother.”<sup>28</sup>

### **He taught the “god-given” doctrine of the seven “Star-Regents” of the Unknown to Grecian philosophers.**

All the classical authors and philosophers who have treated the subject [“Star-Regents” or the informing deities of the seven planets, the Dhyāni-Chohans of Buddhist Esoteric Philosophy], repeat with Hermes Trismegistus, that the seven Rectors — the planets including the sun — were the associates, or the coworkers, of the Unknown All represented by the Demiourgos — commissioned to contain the Cosmos — our planetary world — within seven circles. Plutarch shows them representing “the circle of the celestial worlds.” Again, Denys of Thracia and the learned Clement of Alexandria both describe the Rectors as being shown in the Egyptian temples in the shape of mysterious wheels or spheres always in motion, which made the Initi-

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<sup>26</sup> *Secret Doctrine*, II p. 529

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* II p. 267 *fn.*

<sup>28</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE DANGERS OF PRACTICAL MAGIC) XIV p. 65 *fn.* [On the Hermetic “Tres Mares,” being Light, Heat, and Electricity. *Isis Unveiled* I, p. 257. Cf. Eugenius Abel: *Orphica*, Lipsiae, 1885.]



ates affirm that the problem of perpetual motion had been solved by the celestial wheels in the Initiation Adyta.<sup>29</sup> This doctrine of Hermes was that of Pythagoras and of Orpheus before him. It is called by Proclus “the God-given” doctrine. Iamblichus speaks of it with the greatest reverence. Philostratus tells his readers that the whole sidereal court of the Babylonian heaven was represented in the temples

In globes made of sapphires and supporting the golden images of their respective gods.<sup>30</sup>

### He taught how to affect a whole audience by means of a lodestone.<sup>31</sup>

Pythagoras pays a particular attention to the color and nature of precious stones; while Apollonius of Tyana imparts to his disciples the secret virtues of each, and changes his jewelled rings daily, using a particular stone for every day of the month and according to the laws of judicial astrology.<sup>32</sup> The Buddhists assert that the sapphire produces peace of mind, equanimity, and chases all evil thoughts by establishing a healthy circulation in man. So does an electric battery, with its well-directed fluid, say our electricians. “The sapphire,” say the Buddhists, “will open barred doors and dwellings [for the spirit of man]; it produces a desire for prayer, and brings with it more peace than any other gem; but he who would wear it must lead a pure and holy life.”<sup>33</sup>

### He even imparted the art of oömancy.

Were it otherwise, indeed, why should all the ancient peoples, who were no more fools than we are, have had such a superstitious dread of killing certain birds? In Egypt, he who killed an *ibis*, or the golden hawk — the symbol of the Sun and Osiris — risked and could hardly escape death. The veneration of some nations for birds was such that Zoroaster, in his precepts, forbids their slaughter as a heinous crime. We laugh in our age at every kind of divination. Yet why should so many generations have believed in divination by birds, and even in oömancy, said by Suidas to have been imparted by Orpheus, who taught how to perceive in the yoke and white of the egg, under certain conditions, that which the bird born from it would have seen around it during its short life.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> In one of Des Mousseaux's volumes on Demonology (*La Magie au dix me Siècle*, Paris, 1860 & 64.) the statement of the Abbé Huc is found, and the author testifies to having heard the following story repeatedly from the Abbé himself. In a lamasery of Tibet, the missionary found the following: “It is a simple canvas without the slightest mechanical apparatus attached, as the visitor may prove by examining it at his leisure. It represents a moonlit landscape, but the moon is not at all motionless and dead; quite the reverse, for, according to the Abbé, one would say that our moon herself, or at least her living double, lighted the picture. Each phase, each aspect, each movement of our satellite, is repeated in her *facsimile*, in the movement and progress of the moon in the sacred picture. You see this planet in the painting ride as a crescent, or full, shine brightly, pass behind the clouds, peep out or set, in a manner corresponding in the most extraordinary way with the real luminary. It is, in a word, a most perfect and resplendent reproduction of the pale queen of the night, which received the adoration of so many people in the days of old.” We know from the most reliable sources and numerous eye-witnesses, that such “machines” — not canvas paintings — do exist in certain temples of Tibet; as also the “sidereal wheels” representing the planets, and kept for the same purposes — astrological and magical. Huc's statement was translated in *Isis Unveiled* [Vol. I, p. 441] from Des Mousseaux's volume. [*Op. cit.*, 1864 ed., p. 142 *fn.* to 143 *fn.*]

<sup>30</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (PAGAN SIDEREAL WORSHIP, OR ASTROLOGY) XIV pp. 330-31

<sup>31</sup> [Gesnerus, *Orpheos apanta*, s.v. *Magnes*, p. 321.]

<sup>32</sup> [Philostratus, *Life of Apoll. of Tyana*, London, 1809, III, xli.]

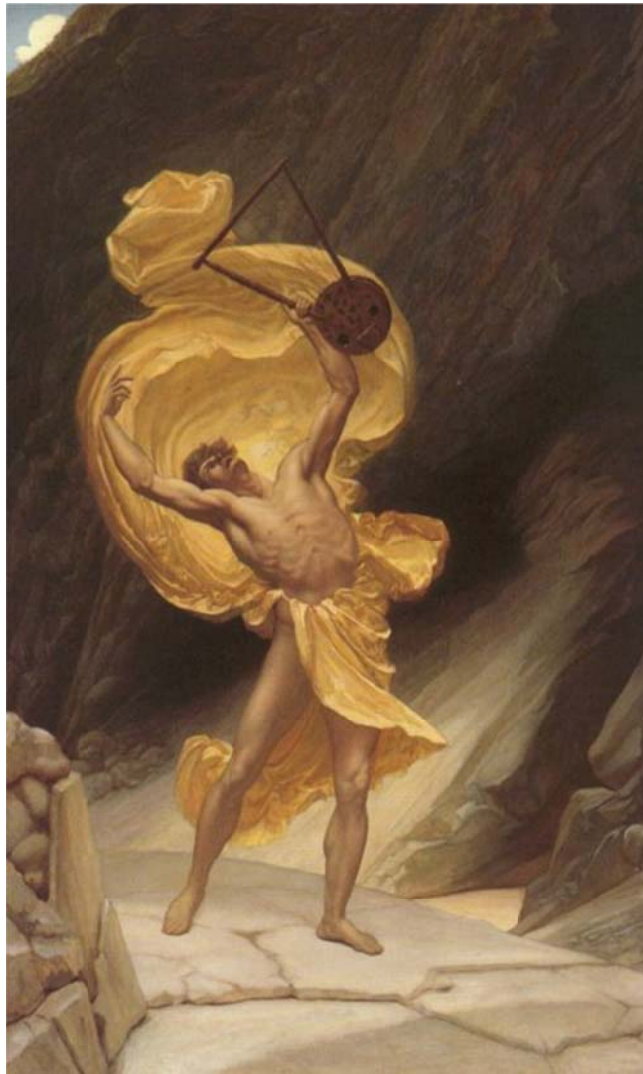
<sup>33</sup> *Isis Unveiled*, I p. 265; [& quoting *Marbodi liber lapidum*, Göttingen, 1799.]

<sup>34</sup> *Secret Doctrine*, I pp. 362-63



**He is the “Initiator,” the “Great Sacrifice.”  
Even Initiated Adepts rely on Him.**

The “BEING”<sup>35</sup> . . . which has to remain nameless, is the *Tree* from which, in subsequent ages, all the great *historically* known Sages and Hierophants, such as the Rishi Kapila, Hermes, Enoch, Orpheus, etc., etc., have branched off. As objective *man*, he is the mysterious (to the profane — the ever invisible) yet ever present Personage about whom legends are rife in the East, especially among the Occultists and the students of the Sacred Science. It is he who changes form, yet remains ever the same. And it is he again who holds spiritual sway over the *initiated* Adepts throughout the whole world. He is, as said, the “Nameless One” who has so many names, and yet whose names and whose very nature are unknown. He is *the* “Initiator,” called the “GREAT SACRIFICE. For, sitting at the threshold of LIGHT, he looks into it from within the circle of Darkness, which he will not cross; nor will he quit his post till the last day of this life-cycle.”<sup>36</sup>



Orpheus returning from the shades (1885)  
Sir William Blake Richmond

<sup>35</sup> [The “Wondrous Being” or the “Initiator,” who descended from a “high region,” the “Voice of the Silence.”]

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* I pp. 207-8



## Orpheus after Thomas Taylor

The following, however, is a summary of what has been transmitted to us by the ancients concerning the original Orpheus, and the great men who have at different periods flourished under this venerable name. The first and genuine Orpheus is said to have been a Thracian, and according to the opinion of many was a disciple of Linus,<sup>37</sup> who flourished at the time when the kingdom of the Athenians was dissolved. Some assert that he was prior to the Trojan war, and that he lived eleven, or as others say nine, generations. But the Greek word *γενεα*, or *generation*, signifies, according to Gyraldus,<sup>38</sup> the space of seven years: for unless this is admitted, how is it possible that the period of his life can have any foundation in the nature of things? If this signification therefore of the word is adopted, Orpheus lived either seventy-seven or sixty-three years, the latter of which, if we may believe astrologers, is a fatal period, and especially to great men, as it proved to be to Aristotle and Cicero.

Our poet, according to fabulous tradition, was torn in pieces by Ciconian women; on which account Plutarch affirms the Thracians were accustomed to beat their wives, in order that they might revenge the death of Orpheus. Hence in the vision of Herus Pamphilius, in the tenth book of Plato's *Republic*,<sup>[620a]</sup> the soul of Orpheus, being destined to descend into another body, is said to have chosen that of a swan, rather than to be born again of a woman; having conceived such a hatred of the sex, on account of his violent death. The cause of his destruction is variously related by authors. Some report that it arose from his being engaged in puerile loves, after the death of Eurydice. Others, that he was destroyed by women intoxicated with wine, because he was the cause of men relinquishing an association with them. Others again assert, according to Pausanias, that on the death of Eurydice, wandering to Aornus, a place in Thesprotia, where it was customary to evocate the souls of the dead, having recalled Eurydice to life, and not being able to detain her, he destroyed himself; nightingales bringing forth their young on his tomb, whose melody exceeded every other of this species. Others again, ascribe his laceration to his having celebrated every divinity except Bacchus, which is very improbable, as among the following hymns there are nine to that deity, under different appellations. Others report that he was delivered by Venus herself into the hands of the Ciconian women, because his mother Calliope had not determined justly between Venus and Proserpine concerning the young Adonis. Many affirm, according to Pausanias, that he was struck by lightning; and Diogenes confirms this by the following verses, composed, as he asserts, by the Muses on his death:

Here by the Muses plac'd, with golden lyre,  
Great Orpheus rests, destroy'd by heavenly fire.

Again, the sacred mysteries called Threscian derived their appellation from the Thracian bard, because he first introduced sacred rites and religion into Greece; and hence the authors of initiation into these mysteries were called Orpheotelestas. Besides, according to Lucian, Orpheus brought astrology and the magical arts into

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<sup>37</sup> Vid. Suid.

<sup>38</sup> *Syntag. Poet.* p. 54



Greece; and as to his drawing to him trees and wild beasts by the melody of his lyre, Palæphatus<sup>39</sup> accounts for it as follows:

“The mad Bacchanalian Nymphs, having violently taken away cattle and other necessaries of life, retired for some days into the mountains. But the citizens, having expected their return for a long time, and fearing the worst for their wives and daughters, called Orpheus, and entreated him to invent some method of drawing them from the mountains. Orpheus, in consequence of this, tuning his lyre conformably to the orgies of Bacchus, drew the mad nymphs from their retreats; who descended from the mountains, bearing at first ferulae, and branches of every kind of trees. But to the men who were eyewitnesses of these wonders, they appeared to bring down the very woods, and from hence gave rise to the fable.<sup>40, 41</sup>”

## Orpheus after GRS Mead

Mead GRS. *Orpheus: The Theosophy of the Greeks*. London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1896; [typographically enhanced by the Philaletheians.]

### The Mythological Orpheus

It would be too tedious to recite here the various glosses of the Orphic legend, or to enter into a critical examination of its history. On the whole the legend has been preserved with sufficient fidelity in the recitals of the poets and the works of mythographers, and the general outlines of it are sketched as follows by P. Decharme in his *Mythologie de la Grèce Antique*.

Orpheus was son of Oeagrus,<sup>42</sup> King of Thrace, and Calliope, one of the Muses. He was the first poet and first inspired singer, and his whole life is the history of the results of divine harmony, Lord of the seven-stringed lyre, all men flocked to hear him, and wild beasts lay peacefully at his feet; trees and stones were not unmoved at the music of his heavenly instrument. The denizens of the unseen world and the princes of Hades rejoiced at the tones of his harp. Companion of the Argonauts in their famous expedition, the good ship Argo glides gently over the peaceful sea at the will of his magic strains; the fearsome moving rocks of the Symplegades, that threatened Argo with destruction, were held motionless; the dragon Colchis that watched the golden fleece was plunged in sleep profound.

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<sup>39</sup> Vid. *Opusc. Mythol.* p. 45

<sup>40</sup> The true meaning of the fable however, in my opinion, is this, that Orpheus by his sacred doctrines tamed men of *rustic* and *savage* dispositions. But the most careless readers must be struck with the similitude of the latter part of this fable to what took place at the wood of Birnam in Macbeth; and to which the following lines allude:

“Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until  
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill  
Shall come against him.”

This coincidence, however, has not been noticed by any of the commentators of Shakespeare.

<sup>41</sup> Taylor T. (*Tr. & Annot.*). *Hymns and Initiations*. (Vol. V of “The Thomas Taylor Series”) Frome: The Prometheus Trust, 2003 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Taylor’s Introduction to *The Mystical Hymns of Orpheus*, pp. 18-19

<sup>42</sup> pp. 616 sq.



His master was Apollo; Apollo taught him the lyre. Rising in the night he would climb the heights of Pangaeus to be the first to greet the glorious god of day.

But great grief was in store for the singer of Apollo. His beloved wife Eurydice, while fleeing from the importunities of Aristaeus, was bitten by a serpent hidden in the grass. In vain the desperate husband strove to assuage the pain of his beloved, and the hills of Thrace resounded with his tuneful plaints. . . . Eurydice is dead. . . . In mad distraction he determines to follow her even to Hades, and there so charms the king of death that Eurydice is permitted to return to earth once more — but on one condition — Orpheus must not look back. And now they had almost recrossed the bounds of death, when at the very last step, so great is his anxiety to see whether his dear wife is still behind him, that he turns to gaze, and Eurydice is instantly reft from his sight:<sup>43</sup>

*“ex oculis subito ceu fumus in auras  
commixtus tenues, fugit diversa”;*

“quick from his eyes she fled in every way,  
like smoke in gentle zephyr disappearing.”

The death of Orpheus is variously recounted. Either he died of grief for the second loss of Eurydice, or was killed by the infuriated Bacchanals, or consumed by the lightning of Zeus for revealing the sacred mysteries to mortals. After his death the Muses collected his torn members and buried them. His head and lyre were carried by the waves to Lesbos.

### Orpheus, a generic name

Such is the bare outline of the romantic Orphic Legend. That Orpheus ever existed as one particular person is highly improbable; that Orpheus was the living symbol that marked the birth of theology and science and art in Greece, is in keeping with the general method of mythology, and relieves us from the many absurd hypotheses that historians have devised to reconcile the irreconcilable.

Orpheus was to the Greeks what Veda Vyāsa was to the Hindus, Enoch to the Ethiopians, and Hermes to the Egyptians. He was the great compiler of sacred scriptures: he invented nothing, he handed on. Orpheus, Veda Vyāsa, Enoch, Hermes and others, are generic names. Veda Vyāsa means the “Veda-arranger.” It is said that the hieroglyphical treatise on the famous Columns of Hermes or Seth, which Joseph affirms were still existing in his time,<sup>44</sup> was the source of the sacred science of ancient Khem, and that Orpheus, Hesiod, Pythagoras and Plato took therefrom the elements of their theology. There was a number of Hermes, the greatest being called Trismegistus, the “thrice greatest,” because he spoke of the “three greatest” powers that “veiled the one Divinity.”<sup>45</sup> We also learn from the MS. of Lascaris<sup>46</sup> that there were no less than six Orpheis known to antiquity.

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<sup>43</sup> Virgil, *Geor.*, iv.499

<sup>44</sup> De Mirville, *Pneumatologie*, iii.70

<sup>45</sup> *Chron. Alexand.*, p. 47

<sup>46</sup> *Mar. Taurin., Prolegg. in Orph.*, p. 98



Ficinus<sup>47</sup> traces what the Hindus call the Guruparamparā chain, or succession of teachers as follows:

“In things pertaining to theology there were in former times six great teachers expounding similar doctrines. The first was Zoroaster, the chief of the Magi; the second Hermes Trismegistus, the head of the Egyptian priesthood; Orpheus succeeded Hermes; Aglaophamus was initiated into the sacred mysteries of Orpheus; Pythagoras was initiated into theology by Aglaophamus; and Plato by Pythagoras. Plato summed up the whole of their wisdom in his Letters.”

### The derivation of the name

Although Orpheus is commonly reported to have been a Thracian, there is no certainty in the matter, and this uncertainty has given licence to the most fantastic derivations of his name, put forward by experienced and amateur philologists to bolster up their own pet theories. The name Orpheus is derived from the Egyptian, Hebrew, Phoenician, Assyrian, Arabic, Persian or Sanskrit, according to the taste or inventive faculty of the philological apologist. Professor Max Müller, in order to support the solar myth theory, derives the name from “Ribhu” or “Arbhu,” of the *Rig Veda*, an epithet of Indra; Indra being said to be one of the names of the Sun.<sup>48</sup> The name is also traced to the Alp or Elf of Teutonic folklore. Larcher says that Orpheus was an Egyptian; *or*, or *oros* standing for Horus, and *phe* or *pho* in Coptic signifying “to engender.”<sup>49</sup> And no doubt there will be writers who will “prove” that the name Orpheus is from radicals in Chinese, Esquimaux, Maya, or even Volapük! There is very little that cannot be proved or disproved by such philology.<sup>50</sup>

#### *Note to Students*

Those wishing to delve deeper on the legendary life and works of Orpheus should read Thomas Taylor’s “Dissertation on the Hymns of Orpheus,” being the Preface from the original 1787 edition of *The Mystical Initiations; or, Hymns of Orpheus*, Appendix I, pp. 276-213, in: Taylor T. (Tr. & Annot.). *Hymns and Initiations*. (Vol. V of “The Thomas Taylor Series”) Frome: The Prometheus Trust, 2003 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)

#### *Painting overleaf*

Thracian girl carrying the head of Orpheus on his lyre (1865) Gustave Moreau, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

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<sup>47</sup> *De Immort. Anim.*, XVII.i.386

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Comparative Mythology*

<sup>49</sup> *Trad. d'Hérod.*, ii.266, n.

<sup>50</sup> Mead G.R.S. *Orpheus: The Theosophy of the Greeks*. London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1896; Part II, Orphic Origins, pp. 14-19



