

# Muses of Lesbos or (Aeschylean) Muses of Pieria? Orpheus' Head on a Fifth-century Hydria

*Sarah Burges Watson*

ONE OF THE MOST spectacular representations of Orpheus to have survived from antiquity is a beautifully preserved Athenian red-figure hydria (*kalpis*) by a painter from the Polygnotus circle, depicting his head, larger than life and very much alive: its eyes wide open. He is surrounded by Muses (*fig. 1*). The hydria, on loan to the Antikenmuseum in Basel (BS 481), has been dated to ca. 440 and may be the earliest representation of the story that Orpheus' head remained articulate after his decapitation by Thracian women.<sup>1</sup> Reaching down to the head, which looks up at him from a crevice in a rock, is a bearded man wearing a laurel crown, with a cloak slung over his shoulder. To his right is a Muse, who holds a large lyre and leans over the head, looking directly at the bearded man. Above her is the inscription ΚΑΛΕ ΚΑΛΟΣ. The man's focus is entirely on the head and it is not clear whether he is aware of the Muses' presence. He is hold-

<sup>1</sup> *LIMC* "Orpheus" 68 = "Mousa/Mousai" 100. On the vase see M. Schmidt, "Ein neues Zeugnis zum Mythos vom Orpheushaupt," *AntK* 15 (1972) 128–137; F. Graf, "Orpheus: A Poet among Men," in J. Bremmer (ed.), *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* (London 1988) 80–106, at 92–95; C. Faraone, "Orpheus' Final Performance: Necromancy and a Singing Head on Lesbos," *StU* SER. IV 2 (2004) 5–27 = "L'ultima esibizione di Orfeo: negromanzia e una testa cantante a Lesbo," in G. Guidorizzi and M. Melotti (eds.), *Orfeo e le sue metamorfosi: mito, arte, poesia* (Rome 2005) 65–85; J. Ustinova, *Caves and the Ancient Greek Mind: Descending Underground in the Search for Ultimate Truth* (Oxford 2009) 106–107.



*Figure 1:* Attic red-figure hydria,  
Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig.  
Photograph by Claire Niggli, courtesy of Antikenmuseum Basel.

ing some ropes, which he may have used to climb down to the head.<sup>2</sup> He may be underground. This would be appealing from a compositional point of view, since the vase would physically represent the cavern into which he had descended through an opening mirrored by the hydria's aperture. Ringing the vase's circumference are six Muses. Some are joining hands and hold-

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Schmidt, *AntK* 15 (1972) 129, 131–132. Graf, in *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* 105 n.58, thinks they are spears, but this is not very persuasive: the ropes are curved at the top and appear to be joined to the 'roof'—i.e. the hydria's aperture.

ing instruments. One seems to have begun a dance. Two are seated on rocks. One has her hands in her lap and her lyre to one side. Her head is covered and her gaze is downcast. The other Muses seem to be encouraging their seated companions to join in. There is a ripple effect: the Muses react to the scene, spreading the message and inviting one another to celebrate.<sup>3</sup> It is the discovery of Orpheus' head that causes this shift from mourning to celebration.<sup>4</sup> The scene of communication with the head therefore functions as an archetype for its subsequent activities.

The most famous story about Orpheus' head tells how it journeyed to Lesbos, still singing, after being thrown into the Hebros river by the women of Thrace.<sup>5</sup> This story, immortalized by Virgil (*G.* 4.520–527) and Ovid (*Met.* 11.50–60), first appears in a fragment of the Hellenistic poet Phanocles, in which it serves as an *aition* for the musicality of Lesbos: from the time of the head's arrival, the island is the most songful of all.<sup>6</sup> The tomb of Orpheus' head on Lesbos is also mentioned by Myrsilus, a mid-third-century Lesbian historian, for whom it serves to explain why the nightingales sing more sweetly in

<sup>3</sup> Susanne Ebbinghaus has pointed out to me that an analogous narrative dynamic can be found on the more or less contemporary Parthenon east pediment with the birth of Athena in the center and the news spreading out from there.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Schmidt, *AntK* 15 (1972) 129.

<sup>5</sup> Testimonia about Orpheus are collected by Alberto Bernabé, *Poetae epici Graeci* II.1–2 (Munich/Leipzig 2004–2005). I adopt Bernabé's numbering throughout this discussion.

<sup>6</sup> Phanocles fr.1 Powell = Orph. 1004T + 1038T + 1054T Bernabé. See N. Hopkinson, *A Hellenistic Anthology* (Cambridge 1988) 45–46; T. Gärtner, "Die hellenistische Katalogdichtung des Phanokles über homosexuelle Liebesbeziehungen. Untersuchungen zur tendenziellen Gestaltung und zum literarischen Nachleben," *Mnemosyne* 61 (2008) 18–44, with further bibliography; F. Jourdan, "Orphée est il véritablement un homme? La réponse grecque: l'efféminé versus l'initiateur des hommes," *LEC* 76 (2008) 129–174.

Antissa than anywhere else.<sup>7</sup>

In Phanocles' poem, Orpheus was killed by Thracian women because he was "the first to reveal male loves." This seems to reflect an early version of the story. Vase paintings dating to the early fifth century depict Orpheus' enchantment of the Thracian men with music and his subsequent death at the hands of their wives; of the available explanations for Orpheus' death, sexual jealousy is the best fit with these images.<sup>8</sup> The head seems also to have been a focus of interest from this period. Two vases of ca. 490 show a Thracian woman carrying the head of Orpheus in one hand and a sword in the other (*LIMC* "Orpheus" 66–67). Since Phanocles seems to have made use of an ancient tradition for the homoerotic Orpheus, it is possible that the Lesbian story about Orpheus' head was also early.

In a careful study of the relevant sources, Margot Schmidt has interpreted the Basel hydria in terms of the Lesbian tradition.<sup>9</sup> In addition to this musical *aition*, she argues plausibly that the image depicts a scene of oracular consultation, bringing it into connection with a passage in Philostratus in which Orpheus' head is said to have been a famous oracle on the island.<sup>10</sup> Schmidt tentatively proposes Terpander as a possible

<sup>7</sup> *FGrHist* 477 F 2 = Orph. 1065T. A second-century CE papyrus (P. Berol. 13426 = Orph. 1054T.IX) says that the head's journey to Methymna in Lesbos was narrated ἐν τοῖς Ὀρφε[ίοις λόγοις].

<sup>8</sup> On the vases depicting Orpheus' enchantment of the Thracians and subsequent death, see M. Schmidt, "Der Tod des Orpheus in Vasendarstellungen aus Schweizer Sammlungen," *AntK Beih.* 9 (1973) 95–105; F. Lissarrague, "Orphée mis à mort," *Musica e storia* 2 (1994) 269–307; B. Cohen, "Man-killers and their Victims: Inversions of the Heroic Ideal in Classical Art," in *Not the Classical Ideal: Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art* (Leiden/Boston 2000) 98–131; T. McNiven, "Behaving like an Other: Tell-tale Gestures in Athenian Vase Painting," in *Not the Classical Ideal* 71–97.

<sup>9</sup> Schmidt, *AntK* 15 (1972) 128–137.

<sup>10</sup> Faraone, *StIt SER.* IV 2 (2004) 5–27, accepts Schmidt's interpretation that the Basel hydria depicts an oracular consultation and adduces fascinating parallels from the Near East, arguing that the testimonia about Or-

candidate for the man reaching down to the head, referring to the genealogy of the lyre in Timotheus' *Persians*, in which Terpander succeeds Orpheus, adding a tenth string to Orpheus' nine.<sup>11</sup>

Philostratus tells how Orpheus' head gave prophecies from a hollow in the earth (*Her.* 28.8 = Orph. 1056T). As Schmidt points out, this seems compatible with the Basel hydria. The bearded man does not appear to be listening to a musical performance. Although his attention is entirely given over to the mysterious head, there are no indications that he has been enchanted like the Thracians in the scenes of Orpheus' musical performance. The facts that he is wearing a laurel crown, that he has apparently climbed down to the head with some purpose in mind, and that he is reaching out to it as if to make contact, seem to point to the oracular interpretation. As we shall see, other fifth-century depictions of Orpheus' revived head lend further support to this argument.

The rest of the passage is more problematic. Philostratus says that the head instructed Odysseus to bring Philoctetes back to Troy. In the Epic Cycle and in Attic tragedy, however, it is Helenus who prophesies about Philoctetes. Nowhere else is Orpheus connected with the Philoctetes story. Philostratus also quotes an oracle that the head allegedly gave to Cyrus the Great, drawing a parallel between Cyrus' beheading and its own fate. Again, this connection is a one-off. Elsewhere Philostratus says that Apollo stopped the head from prophesying because its fame had become so great that people were no

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pheus' talking head draw on necromantic rites involving the consultation of a skull. Cf. Graf, in *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* 94. On analogues for the head in Indo-European myth see J. F. Nagy, "Hierarchy, Heroes, and Heads: Indo-European Structures in Greek Myth," in L. Edmunds (ed.), *Approaches to Greek Myth* (Baltimore 1990) 199–238.

<sup>11</sup> Timoth. *Pers.* 791.221–226 (Hordern = 234–238 Janssen = Orph. 883T). Timotheus connects Terpander with Antissa, the site of Orpheus' head in the tradition recorded by Myrsilus (*FGrHist* 477 F 2 = Orph. 1065T).

longer frequenting his own oracles (*VA* 4.14 = Orph. 1057T).

These two passages of Philostratus are the only extant evidence that Orpheus' head gave prophecies on Lesbos. Lucian (*Ind.* 11 = Orph. 1052T.1) says that the Lesbians buried the head in the place which later became the *Bakkheion*. This may reflect a more ancient connection between Orpheus' head and Dionysiac cult on Lesbos, but there is no mention of oracles.<sup>12</sup> In all other sources which connect Orpheus with Lesbos, the head serves as an aetiology for the island's musicality. Ivan Linforth considered the tale of the Lesbian oracle to be a fabrication of Philostratus.<sup>13</sup>

As for the musical Lesbos tradition, as Fritz Graf has pointed out, even if it does date to the Classical period, the extant evidence does not suggest that it was the dominant story about Orpheus' head in circulation at this time; nor can we be sure that the Basel hydria makes use of it.<sup>14</sup> In fifth-century sources,

<sup>12</sup> Pausanias (10.19.3 = *FGrHist* 479 F 2a) says that, in the water near Methymna, fishermen found a wooden head whose visage appeared divine and were instructed by the Pythia to dedicate it to Dionysos Phallen. They honoured the image with sacrifices and prayers, sending a bronze version to Delphi. The inhabitants of Antissa moved to Methymna in 187 BCE after the destruction of their city.

<sup>13</sup> I. Linforth, *The Arts of Orpheus* (Berkeley 1941) 133.

<sup>14</sup> Graf, in *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* 95. Graf suggests that Conon's version of the story may refer to a non-Lesbian tradition about Orpheus' head (*FGrHist* 26 F 1.XLV = Orph. 1061T = M. K. Brown, *The Narratives of Konon* [Munich 2002] 301–308). Conon says that after Orpheus' death a plague afflicted Thrace and the Thracian women were instructed by an oracle to find and bury Orpheus' head. Eventually, with the help of a fisherman, they discovered it at the mouth of the river Meles. The site of its burial was a *heroon* and eventually won out as a temple. Graf has argued that this cannot be the same river Meles as the one connected with Homer and Smyrna and that it must be a Thracian tributary, otherwise unknown. The idea of Thracian women finding the head near Smyrna does, indeed, seem unlikely. But given the proximity of the Meles to Lesbos as well as Orpheus' connections with Homeric poetry, the Lesbian version of Orpheus' story as told in Lucian inevitably comes to mind. Conon may have been mixing different versions of the story. On the river Meles and Homer see B. Gra-

Orpheus' most important geographical connections are Pieria, through his mother Kalliope, and Thrace, where he enchants the Thracian men with his music and is subsequently decapitated. Our earliest literary reference to the story of Orpheus' talking head seems to imply a location in Thrace. In a curious formulation, the chorus of Euripides' *Alcestis* (438 BCE) say that although they have been carried aloft by the Muse, they have found no remedies stronger than Necessity; "not even on the *Thracian* writing tablets which the voice of Orpheus wrote down."<sup>15</sup> The tablets seem to be products of dictation by the head. A scholion on the passage says that Heraclides *Physikos* wrote about a temple of Dionysos on Mt. Haimos, where writings <of Orpheus> were inscribed on tablets.<sup>16</sup>

The principal purpose of the story about Orpheus' head was surely to account for writings ascribed to him. In the fifth century, the most important contexts in which Orphic writings played a role were Bacchic and Eleusinian mysteries and Pythagoreanism.<sup>17</sup> There will be more to say in due course about Bacchic mysteries and the Thracian tradition about Orpheus' head. As for Eleusis, Orpheus' mythological connection

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ziosi, *Inventing Homer: The Early Reception of Epic* (Cambridge 2002) 72–77; on Orpheus and Homer see G. Nagy, "Éléments orphiques chez Homère," *Kernos* 14 (2001) 1–9, *Homer the Classic* (Washington 2009), and *Homer the Preclassic* (Berkeley 2010). On Conon see A. Henrichs, "Three Approaches to Greek Mythography," in *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* 242–277.

<sup>15</sup> Eur. *Alc.* 962–969 (= in part, Orph. 812T). A helpful discussion of relevant evidence may be found in Linforth, *The Arts of Orpheus* 119–134. Linforth (122) notes the similarity of the formulation with the "myths on Pierian writing tablets" whose veracity is called into question in Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis* (797–800).

<sup>16</sup> Schol. *Alc.* 968 (II 239 Schwartz) = Orph. 813T.I; the supplement is by Wilamowitz.

<sup>17</sup> See the seminal discussion of Walter Burkert, "Orphism and Bacchic Mysteries: New Evidence and Old Problems of Interpretation," in W. Wuellner (ed.), *Protocol of the 28th Colloquy of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture* (Berkeley 1977) 1–8 = *Kleine Schriften* III (Göttingen 2006) 37–46.

there is accounted for through Mousaios, his son according to Diodorus (4.25.1 = Orph. 916T), and the didactic addressee in some of his poems.<sup>18</sup> A papyrus of the second century BCE, if correctly supplemented, may actually refer to Mousaios as having written down the poems of Orpheus.<sup>19</sup> A late-fifth-century kylix from Naples, now in Cambridge, apparently depicts this very process. A seated youth in a travelling hat, plausibly identified as Mousaios,<sup>20</sup> takes dictation from the head, which rests on the ground.<sup>21</sup> Apollo stands to the right of the head, reaching over it and pointing at the youth with his arm. His gesture is authoritative; he seems to be issuing a command that the boy write down whatever the head is saying. The schema of the kylix is very similar to that of the Basel hydria, with the youth occupying the same position as the bearded man, whilst Apollo takes the position occupied by the Muse who presides over Orpheus' head. On the reverse of the vase are Muses with a lyre (and perhaps lyre strap), which may belong to Orpheus. Mousaios is not a good fit with the Lesbos tradition. His name makes his affinities with the Muses absolutely clear. This points to Pieria. Like Orpheus, he also has Thracian associations. Above all, he is Eleusinian.<sup>22</sup> It does not seem likely that poetry

<sup>18</sup> On sources in which Orpheus dictates to Mousaios, see Linforth, *The Arts of Orpheus* 123–133. On Mousaios and Orpheus see also F. Graf, *Eleusis und die orphische Dichtung Athens in vorhellenistischer Zeit* (Berlin 1974) 9–22. Pausanias describes Mousaios as “copying Orpheus in everything” (10.7.2). He surely has in mind Mousaios' poems, all but one of which he ascribed to Onomacritus (1.22.7). The fact that Herodorus of Herakleia wrote a treatise on the poetry of Orpheus and Mousaios suggests that their writings were closely connected in the late fifth/early fourth century. Their frequent pairing in Plato points in the same direction (*Ap.* 41A, *Resp.* 364E, *Ion* 536B, *Prt.* 316D); cf. *Ar. Ran.* 1032–1033 and *Hippias* 86 B 6 D.-K.

<sup>19</sup> P.Berol. 44 = Orph. 383T. See Linforth, *The Arts of Orpheus* 123.

<sup>20</sup> See Linforth, *The Arts of Orpheus* 125–133.

<sup>21</sup> *LIMC* “Orpheus” 70 = “Apollon” 872 = *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1401, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Graf, *Eleusis* 17: “Mousaios ist wohl ursprünglich Athener, Eleusinier, und behält seine Verbindung mit Eleusis immer bei.” On Mousaios' Eleu-



or oracles used in the Eleusinian mysteries should have been dictated in Lesbos: Mousaios' consultation of the oracular head is surely to be located in Pieria or Thrace.

The affinities between Orphic and Pythagorean ideas are well known. Herodotus asserts that Orphic rites are really Pythagorean (2.81). Other fifth- and fourth-century intellectuals say that writings ascribed to Orpheus are, in fact, Pythagorean.<sup>23</sup> This is the outsider's perspective. So, too, is Herodotus' version of the story about the Thracian Zalmoxis, according to which he was a slave of Pythagoras who invited the most prominent Thracians to dinner parties, where he gave lessons in immortality and then duped them by disappearing into a cavern (Hdt. 4.95).<sup>24</sup> It seems very possible, however, that there also existed an inside perspective on the mythical connection between Pythagoras and Thracian teachings about the afterlife in which Orpheus played a key role. We find such a perspective in the Dorian *hieros logos* which claims that Pythagoras received

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sinian genealogy, see also A. Henrichs, "Zur Genealogie des Mousaios," *ZPE* 58 (1985) 1–8.

<sup>23</sup> On Orphics and Pythagoreans, see W. Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1972) 125–132, *Kleine Schriften* III 37–46, and "Craft versus Sect: the Problem of the Orphics and Pythagoreans," in B. F. Meyer and E. P. Sanders (eds.), *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition* III (Philadelphia 1982) 1–22, 183–189 = *Kleine Schriften* III 191–216; M. West, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford 1983) 7–15; A. Bernabé, "Una etimología platónica: *sôma/sêma*," *Philologus* 139 (1995) 204–237; P. Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic* (Oxford 1995).

<sup>24</sup> A similar tale was told about Pythagoras. See Burkert, *Lore and Science* 155–159; Graf, in *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* 91–92. The similarities between Orpheus and Zalmoxis form part of E. R. Dodds' argument that the myth of Orpheus reflects a shamanic background (*The Greeks and the Irrational* [Berkeley 1951] 135–178). In Plato's *Charmides* (156D) Socrates refers to promises of immortality offered by "followers of Zalmoxis"; see C. Faraone, "A Socratic Leaf-Charm for Headache (*Charmides* 155B–157C), Orphic Gold Leaves and the Ancient Greek Tradition of Leaf Amulets," in J. Dijkstra et al. (eds.), *Myths, Martyrs, and Modernity. Studies in the History of Religions in Honour of Jan N. Bremmer* (Leiden 2009) 145–166.

his teachings about the gods and number in Pieria from the mystagogue Aglaophamos, who in turn, received them from Orpheus' mother Kalliope on Mt. Pangaion (Orph. 507T). Luc Brisson has argued that the Aglaophamos story is a Hellenistic invention, but Walter Burkert has collected evidence for Pythagoras' hierophantic connections which dates to the Classical period.<sup>25</sup> There is, moreover, another fifth-century myth with which the Aglaophamos story is a very good match and which seems to have served as an *aition* for Orpheus' connection with Bacchic mysteries. The *Bassarides* of Aeschylus has the same geographical location as the Aglaophamos story and is a much better fit than Philostratus (or Phanocles) with the extant fifth-century sources about Orpheus' head. It has received very little consideration in previous discussions of the vase paintings.<sup>26</sup>

The *Bassarides* was the second play of Aeschylus' *Lykourgeia* tetralogy, whose subject was resistance to Dionysos by Lykourgos, king of the Edonians.<sup>27</sup> Although very few fragments of the *Bassarides* are extant, we do have a summary of the tragedy in Ps.-Eratosthenes' *Catasterisms*, according to which Orpheus was dismembered by fox-skin-clad female followers of Dionysos (Bassarids) because of his exclusive worship of Apollo, whom he worshipped as Helios, climbing Mt. Pangaion every night so

<sup>25</sup> L. Brisson, "Nascita di un mito filosofico: Giamblico (*VP*. 146) su Aglaophamos," in M. Tortorelli Ghidini et al. (eds.), *Tra Orfeo e Pitagora. Origini e incontri di culture nell' antichità* (Naples 2000) 237–253; Burkert, *Lore and Science* 155–159.

<sup>26</sup> Schmidt, *AntK* 15 (1972) 129 n.6, mentions that some of Ps.-Eratosthenes' summary goes back to Aeschylus, but does not consider the possibility of connections with the vase paintings.

<sup>27</sup> On the *Lykourgeia/Bassarides* see K. Deichgräber, *Die Lykurgie des Aischylos: Versuch einer Wiederherstellung der Dionysischen Tetralogie* (Göttingen 1939); M. West, "Tragica VI," *BICS* 30 (1983) 63–71, 81–82, and "The Lycurgus Trilogy," *Studies in Aeschylus* (Stuttgart 1990) 26–50; M. Di Marco, "Dioniso ed Orfeo nelle *Bassaridi* di Eschilo," in A. Masaracchia (ed.), *Orfeo e l'orfismo. Atti del seminario nazionale* (Rome 1993) 101–153; R. Seaford, "Mystic Light in Aeschylus' *Bassarai*," *CQ* 55 (2005) 602–606.

that he could be first to greet the dawn.<sup>28</sup> The epitome in the *Catasterisms* says that after his death the Muses gathered up his scattered limbs and buried him in Leibethra. No mention is made of the head, but it seems unlikely that the Muses buried a headless Orpheus.

Orpheus' burial in Pierian Leibethra makes sense in terms of his origins. His mother Kalliope, like all the Muses, belongs in Pieria. His father is sometimes Apollo, but usually Oiagros—a Thracian river god or king. Pausanias<sup>29</sup> tells us that on Polygnotus' mural in the Cnidian Lesche at Delphi (ca. 460 BCE) Orpheus was represented as a Greek. This is also the case in early vase paintings, where his appearance is contrasted with that of the Thracian men, whom he enchants with his music.<sup>30</sup> Given the setting of the *Bassarides*, it is probable that Aeschylus made Orpheus a Pierian Thracian.<sup>31</sup> Thucydides (2.99) says that the Pierians originally lived in (Macedonian) Pieria but were expelled by the Temenid kings into Thrace, where they occupied the territory south of Mt. Pangaion and east of the river Strymon. The Edonians, too, of whom Lykourgos was king, had been displaced from Macedonia and were located to

<sup>28</sup> S. Radt, *TrGF* III pp.138–139. There are two manuscript traditions for the epitome in Ps.-Eratosthenes, both ancient. The tradition with greater detail (T and R) was read by the Latin scholiasts who refer to the story. This is the version printed by Radt (and Sommerstein in the Loeb), following West, *BICS* 30 (1983) 63–71, 81–82, and *Studies in Aeschylus* 26–50. In the fuller version, Orpheus is originally devoted to Dionysos but switches his allegiance to Apollo after his visit to the underworld in quest of his wife. As Di Marco has shown, in *Orfeo e l'orfismo* 117–124, this version, which makes Orpheus an apostate, is difficult to reconcile with the chronology of the *Lykourgeia*. He argues persuasively that T and R have been supplemented with material derived from elsewhere in the Orpheus tradition.

<sup>29</sup> Paus. 10.30.6 = Orph. 1001T.I.

<sup>30</sup> It was only in the mid-/late fifth century that Orpheus acquired Thracian and (still later) Phrygian attributes. See Lissarrague, *Musica e storia* 2 (1994) 273–274.

<sup>31</sup> On the Thracian setting of the drama see E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian* (Oxford 1989) 130, 133, 136, 143–144.

the north of Mt. Pangaion.<sup>32</sup> All this is a good fit with the geography of Aeschylus' *Bassarides*.

Ps.-Apollodorus (1.3.2) mentions that Orpheus was buried in Pieria in conjunction with his dismemberment by maenads and his founding of Dionysiac mysteries. An epigram by Damagetus (*Anth.Pal.* 7.9 = Orph. 1071T) talks of Orpheus' founding of Bacchic mysteries and his burial at the Thracian foot of Mt. Olympus. Massimo Di Marco has plausibly argued that Aeschylus' tragedy served as an aetiology for Orpheus' connection with Orphic/Bacchic rites.<sup>33</sup> In a myth which seems to have played a key role in these rites, Dionysos Zagreus, the son of Zeus and Persephone, was dismembered and eaten by man's ancestors, the Titans.<sup>34</sup> In the Aeschylean version of the myth, Orpheus' death mirrors that of Dionysos Zagreus.<sup>35</sup> This may have been an Aeschylean innovation: in the version of Orpheus' death used by the early vase painters, there is no dismemberment and Dionysos does not seem to be involved.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> On the complex ethnographic status of Macedonians see J. Hall, "Contested Ethnicities: Perceptions of Macedonia within Evolving Definitions of Greek Identity," in I. Malkin (ed.), *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity* (Washington 2001) 159–186.

<sup>33</sup> Di Marco, in *Orfeo e l'orfismo* 151.

<sup>34</sup> On this myth and its relation to 'Orphism' in the Classical period see M. Nilsson, "Early Orphism and Kindred Religious Movements," *HThR* 28 (1935) 181–230; Linforth, *The Arts of Orpheus* 147–156; Burkert, *Kleine Schriften* III 37–46, and "L'orfismo riscoperto," *Da Omero ai magi. La tradizione orientale nella cultura greca* (Venice 1999) 59–86; M. West, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford 1983) 15–26, 140–176; F. Graf and S. I. Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife* (London/New York 2007) 50–93; A. Henrichs, "Dionysus Dismembered and Restored to Life: the Earliest Evidence," in M. Herrero de Jáuregui et al. (eds.), *Tracing Orpheus: Studies of Orphic Fragments* (Berlin 2011) 61–68. R. Edmonds has argued that the Zagreus myth is a modern construct: "Tearing Apart the Zagreus Myth: A Few Disparaging Remarks on Orphism and Original Sin," *CLAnt* 18 (1999) 35–73; he has been successfully refuted by A. Bernabé, "La toile de Pénélope," *RHR* 219 (2002) 401–433, and Henrichs, in *Tracing Orpheus* 61–68.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Proclus *In R.* I 174–175 Kroll = Orph. 503T.

<sup>36</sup> Lissarrague, *Musica e storia* 2 (1994) 285.

Scholars have rightly argued that Orpheus' connection with Bacchic mysteries presupposes the existence of mystical texts in his name. Since, in Aeschylus' tragedy, Orpheus was a devotee of Apollo until his death, his association with Dionysos must have been posthumous. This makes it likely that his talking head played a role.<sup>37</sup> The investiture of Orpheus' head as a prophet of Bakkhos would have provided a fitting resolution to the tragedy and a vehicle for religious texts.

The establishment of an oracle at the end of the *Bassarides* fits well with the most plausible reconstruction of the *Lykourgeia*, in which Dionysos prophesied Lykourgos' punishment at the start of the third play.<sup>38</sup> It is also a good fit with external evidence. Herodotus (7.111.2) refers to a Thracian oracle of Dionysos, controlled by the Satrai, who were neighbours of the Edonians. In Euripides' *Hecuba* (1267), a Thracian oracle of Dionysos prophesies Hecuba's transformation into a dog. A scholiast comments that some locate the oracle around Mt. Pangaion, others on Mt. Haimos. He refers to the passage of Euripides' *Alkestis* (962–969) discussed above. As we have seen, a scholion on that passage says that Heraclides *Physikos* wrote about a temple of Dionysos on Mt. Haimos, where writings <of Orpheus> were inscribed on tablets.

The epitome of the *Bassarides* says that the Muses gathered Orpheus' limbs and buried him in Leibethra. An interesting parallel is provided by [Euripides'] *Rhesos* (962–973 = Orph. 548T), for which the *Lykourgeia* is generally agreed to have been an important model.<sup>39</sup> An unnamed Muse obtains postmortem

<sup>37</sup> Cf. West, *Studies in Aeschylus* 45. West draws attention to the parallel with the *Bakkhai* (for which the *Lykourgeia* was an important model) and suggests that Orpheus' head might have been displayed by his murderers. On the *Lykourgeia* and the *Bakkhai*, see E. R. Dodds, *Euripides Bacchae*<sup>2</sup> (Oxford 1960) xxxi–xxxiii.

<sup>38</sup> See Di Marco, in *Orfeo e l'orfismo* 109–116.

<sup>39</sup> For discussion see Linforth, *The Arts of Orpheus* 60–66; J. Diggle, "The Prophet of Bacchus: *Rhesos* 970–973," *StIt SER.* III 5 (1987) 167–172; West, *Studies in Aeschylus* 32; Di Marco, in *Orfeo e l'orfismo* 115; A. Feickert, *Euripidis*

privileges for her son Rhesos on the grounds that Persephone is obliged to honour “the friends of Orpheus.” She says that Orpheus, Rhesos’ cousin, revealed to Athens her secret mysteries and that Mousaios, “who has acquired greater renown than any other Athenian,” was trained by Phoebus and the Muses. The Muse is referring to the Eleusinian mysteries.<sup>40</sup> She says that her son will become an *anthropodaimon*, a prophet of Dionysos, “who has settled on Mt. Pangaion.”<sup>41</sup> These events seem to refer to the god’s arrival in Thrace as dramatized in the *Lykourgeia* and match the evidence for a Dionysiac oracle on (or near) Mt. Pangaion. Orpheus (or his head) is an obvious candidate for the first priesthood of this oracle.

It is probable that, in Aeschylus’ play, Apollo assisted the Muses in resolving the theological dispute concerning his overzealous protégé. An Aeschylean fragment (F 341 Radt), quoted by Macrobius and assigned by Wilamowitz and Nauck to the *Bassarides*, seems to indicate a kind of synthesis between Apollo and Dionysos, with sharing of prophetic attributes. This is consistent with the establishment of Apollo’s priest as a prophet of Bakkhos. It also fits with external evidence. In an anonymous epigram (*Anth.Pal.* 7.10 = Orph. 1054T.ii), Apollo Lykeios mourns Orpheus’ death together with the Muses. We have already seen one vase painting in which Apollo presides over the oracular head. An Attic red-figure hydria in Dunedin, dated to around 420 BCE, shows Apollo touching the head of Orpheus with his laurel staff.<sup>42</sup> To the left of this central scene

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*Rhesus* (Frankfurt 2004) 373–374; V. Liapis, *A Commentary on the Rhesus attributed to Euripides* (Oxford 2012) 325–327.

<sup>40</sup> See Graf, *Eleusis* 29.

<sup>41</sup> Accepting the reading of line 972 adopted by Diggle, *StIt* SER. III 5 (1987) 167–172.

<sup>42</sup> *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1174, 1 = Otago Museum Dunedin E 48.266 = *LIMC* “Orpheus” 69 = “Mousa/Mousai” 99. On this vase see Linforth, *The Arts of Orpheus* 126–133; Schmidt, *AntK* 15 (1972) 130–131; Faraone, *StIt* SER. IV 2 (2004) 9–10.

is a woman in mourning; to the right stands another woman, who gestures towards the head. The women may be Muses. Here, again, Apollo seems to be presiding over a kind of oracular investiture.

All this fits well with the scenario on the Basel hydria. Schmidt interpreted the presence of the Muses as indicative of the Lesbian tradition, but in light of the evidence discussed, it seems more likely that the fifth-century vase paintings reflect the Pierian/Thracian tradition about Orpheus' death and post-mortem honours which Aeschylus also used in his *Bassarides*. Indeed, it seems very possible that the Muses' role in the resolution of Aeschylus' tragedy provided the inspiration for the scene depicted on the Basel hydria. We should not assume that the Basel hydria is an illustration of Aeschylus' play—most notably, there does not seem to be any reference to Dionysos on the vase. But the extant evidence suggests that both the fifth-century vase painters and Aeschylus were making use of a story in which Orpheus' head was established as an oracle in Pierian Thrace by the Muses and Apollo following his death at the hands of Thracian women. This story seems to have played a role in Pythagorean, Bacchic, and Eleusinian traditions. Aeschylus' tragedy is likely to have played a key role in the authorization of this myth.

As for Schmidt's tentative suggestion that Terpander is the bearded figure in the vase, it should be stressed that Timotheus' nome, composed forty years after the probable date of the vase, gives no hint of an encounter between the singers. The other testimonia in which Terpander and Orpheus are mentioned together (Orph. 884T) assume that they are widely separated by mythical chronology. This makes sense: Terpander belongs to the seventh century BCE, whereas Orpheus was supposed to have sailed with the Argonauts and, hence, was a pre-Homeric poet. What is more, the man on the Basel hydria does not have any attributes to suggest that he is a musician. Nor, as we have seen, does he appear to be listening to a musical performance. As Schmidt rightly argued, the Basel hydria, like other fifth-century representations of Orpheus' head, seems

to depict the oracular tradition.

Who, then, could the naked figure be?<sup>43</sup> If we combine the story in Aeschylus with the other contemporary iconographic evidence, three obvious candidates suggest themselves; unfortunately, none is a good fit with the image. One is Apollo: since the man is wearing a laurel crown, it seems legitimate to connect the hydria with the two other fifth-century vases in which

<sup>43</sup> Faraone, *StIt* SER. IV 2 (2004) 27, suggests a possible identification with Odysseus, following the evidence in Philostratus. As noted above, Philostratus' connection of Orpheus with the Philoctetes story is highly idiosyncratic. One would also expect a sword and *pilos* for Odysseus. As we have seen, the Basel hydria seems to depict the head's inauguration as an oracle. A hero from the Trojan War is not consistent with this chronology. Another possibility is raised by Conon's version of the story, in which the Thracian women find the head with the help of fishermen (n.14 above). A fisherman would be a plausible candidate for either the Lesbian or the Pierian version of the story, but the man does not have any attributes to identify him as such. Cf. Schmidt, *AntK* 15 (1972) 129. In addition to the iconographic evidence discussed above, there is also a group of late-fourth-century Etruscan mirrors which depict Orpheus uttering prophecies to a scribe who takes notes. Apollo is present in some of the scenes and possibly a Muse. A bearded man appears in some of the scenes, bearing the title *Inue*, which may be the Etruscan form of Inuus, the Roman god of cattle. A second man is also sometimes present, labeled *Umaele*. The most common Greek identification for this name, which has, however, been disputed, is Eumelos, son of Alkestis and Admetos, who participated in the Trojan War (see G. Camporeale, "Umaele, Umaile," *LIMC* VIII.1 pp.158–159). As we have seen, a hero of the Trojan War does not seem a good match for the Basel hydria. Inuus is obviously a local variant. Indeed, as I. Krauskopf notes, "Aliunea," *LIMC* I.1 pp.529–531, the Greek myth seems to have undergone significant elaboration and variation in its Etruscan context. A temple seems to be depicted; the scribe is called Aliunea/Alpunea or Talmithe (Palamedes) rather than Mousaios; other divinities, such as Hermes and Athena, are present, and a marriage scene may be involved in one of the mirrors. Hence these mirrors, fascinating though they are, are of no help in interpreting the figure on the Basel hydria. For discussion see R. D. De Puma and W. K. C. Guthrie, "An Etruscan Mirror with the Propheying Head of Orpheus," *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University* 60 (2001) 18–29.



Apollo is depicted in the presence of the head.<sup>44</sup> But the man on the Basel hydria is bearded, which is never the case for Apollo. Nor does he have a single attribute to suggest the presence of Dionysos. Indeed, there is no sign of the man's divine authority, nor of a collaboration with the Muses on equal terms. A third possibility is Mousaios. But Mousaios' age does not fit since he is supposed to be Orpheus' pupil or his son. Indeed, he is always represented as a youth/ephebe in Classical iconography.

An intriguing, if speculative, alternative is raised by an Attic red-figure cup from Cerveteri dated to 430–420 BCE, which depicts a bearded figure seated and reading from a scroll.<sup>45</sup> His lower body is covered with a *himation*. In front of him is a naked youth holding writing tablets. A box (perhaps containing further writing tablets) is behind the boy. Both figures are named: the bearded man is Linos, the youth Mousaios. The cup's exterior is decorated with athletes. Linos is bearded in a number of Attic representations which depict him teaching the lyre to ephebes. The beard seems to be an indication of his status as a teacher. His most famous pupil was Herakles, who, like Orpheus, was an Argonaut. According to one fifth-century tradition, Herakles killed Linos when he flew into a rage after being criticized. This scene is illustrated on a red-figure cup from Vulci dated to the early fifth century.<sup>46</sup> Herakles is wielding an axe against his teacher, who has raised his lyre above his head. Around Linos cluster a group of naked ephebes—obviously his students—who are clearly distressed, but incapable of warding off the might of Herakles. On the wall above are writing tablets. This and other scenes of Linos' death may have been modeled on images depicting Orpheus' death.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> See 448 and 454–455 above.

<sup>45</sup> *LIMC* “Linos” 1 = *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1254, 80.

<sup>46</sup> *LIMC* “Herakles” 1671 = *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 437, 128.

<sup>47</sup> On similarities between vases depicting the deaths of Linos, Orpheus, and a lyre-playing Aegisthus see Schmidt, *AntK* Beih. 9 (1973) 96–98.

From the perspective of the literary evidence, Linos is an appealing possibility. Like Mousaios, he has a somewhat exiguous mythical personality, which seems to have developed mainly in conjunction with his role as the author of poetry. As with Mousaios, there is significant overlap with Orpheus. Both were believed to pre-date Homer.<sup>48</sup> Ps.-Apollodorus and Asclepiades Tragicus make them brothers—sons of Kalliope and Oiagros or Apollo.<sup>49</sup> In a fascinating passage, Diodorus says that Orpheus was one of Linos' three most famous students (the others being Herakles and Orpheus' rival Thamyris) and connects Linos' invention of writing both with the writing down of myths of Dionysos and with Orpheus.<sup>50</sup> It is to Diodorus that we owe the earliest evidence that Mousaios was the son of Orpheus;<sup>51</sup> for this he is reporting Eleusinian tradition.

Other sources also connect Linos with the invention of writing.<sup>52</sup> He is depicted with writing tablets in several of the vase paintings.<sup>53</sup> As with Orpheus, Pythagoreans may have composed poetry under Linos' name.<sup>54</sup> His poems are also frequently brought into connection with those of Orpheus and Mousaios. A scholion on *Iliad* 18.570 says that the poem *Sphaira*, attributed to Orpheus, was dedicated to Linos (= Linus 77T.I-II). Ps.-Alcidas quotes an epigram supposedly on Orpheus' tomb in Dion, which describes Orpheus as the teacher of Herakles: he calls Orpheus the founder of writing,

<sup>48</sup> Sextus Empiricus (*Math.* 1.203 = Orph. 882T) says that some make Hesiod, Linos, Orpheus, and Mousaios (in that order) older than Homer.

<sup>49</sup> *Poetae Epici Graeci* II.3 Linus 34T.

<sup>50</sup> Diod. 3.67.1–4. The *Suda* s.v. “Orpheus” also says that Orpheus was the student of Linos (= Linus 59aT.II); elsewhere, however, the *Suda* makes Linos Orpheus' great-grandfather (s.v. “Homer,” III 525.4 Adler = Linus 4T).

<sup>51</sup> Diod. 4.25.1 = *Poetae epici Graeci* II.3 Musaeus 10T.

<sup>52</sup> Linus 53T–55T.

<sup>53</sup> *LIMC* “Linos” 1, “Herakles” 1667–1668.

<sup>54</sup> See West, *The Orphic Poems* 61.

Linos—of *mousike*.<sup>55</sup> The transfer of Orpheus' bones from Leibethra to Dion is narrated in a fascinating tale reported by Pausanias, which seems to have been inspired by Aeschylus' *Bassarides*.<sup>56</sup> Finally, in a tantalizing fragment of the comic poet Alexis dating to the fourth century BCE, Orphic poetry heads the list of books which Linos offers Herakles from his library in his attempt to educate him.<sup>57</sup>

Since there is no extant source in which Linos is explicitly connected with Orpheus' head, this suggestion must remain tentative. My main concern has been to demonstrate that, on the available evidence, the case for a Pierian/Thracian tradition for the fifth-century vase paintings is considerably stronger than that for a Lesbian one and that the vases seem to adopt the same tradition about Orpheus' death and postmortem honours that Aeschylus dramatized in his *Bassarides*. The Pierian setting is also a good fit with contemporary history: the Edonians and Mt. Pangaion had been the object of considerable interest in the 460s, since in 465/4 the Athenians had

<sup>55</sup> Orph. 1027T + 1073T + Linus 62T.II = Alc. *Ulix.* 24. On the epigram see I. Linforth, "Two Notes on the Legend of Orpheus," *TAPA* 62 (1931) 5–11.

<sup>56</sup> Pausanias (9.30.7–11) tells a story about an urn in Leibethra which contained the bones of Orpheus: an oracle of Dionysos is said to have warned the citizens that if Orpheus' bones saw the sun (i.e. Apollo), their city would be destroyed ὑπὸ σῦός (by a wild boar). The citizens discounted the oracle on the grounds that no boar would be big enough to destroy their city. But one day a shepherd fell asleep whilst leaning against the pillar on which the urn rested. In his sleep, he began to sing Orphic poems in a loud voice. All the locals came to listen and in their eagerness to get close to the singer, they knocked the urn over and the bones of Orpheus saw the sun. That night, there was a great rainfall and their river, *Sus*, burst its banks and destroyed their city. The story is apparently a piece of local mythologizing to explain why Orpheus' bones are now in Dion rather than Leibethra. The original location of Orpheus' grave in Leibethra matches the epitome. The story appears to be modeled on Aeschylus. The fact of re-modelling suggests that the Aeschylean version had some authority.

<sup>57</sup> Alexis *Linus* fr.140 K.-A. = Linus 73T.

suffered a disastrous defeat at their hands in a battle over the silver mines on the mountain. The increasing power of Teres' Odrysian kingdom had resulted in a burgeoning of Athenian interest in Thracian mythmaking.<sup>58</sup> Assuming that Schmidt's dating is correct, the hydria was produced about twenty years after Aeschylus' play and is contemporary with Euripides' *Alceſtis*, our earliest literary reference to Orpheus' talking head, which refers to Orphic writing tablets in Thrace. Orpheus' head was clearly a subject of interest in Athens at this time. An obvious beneficiary and perhaps the ultimate source of this head-related buzz was Eleusis, Aeschylus' own deme, where Orpheus was known as the founder of mysteries from at least the end of the fifth century.<sup>59</sup>

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Durham University  
sarah.burgeswatson@durham.ac.uk

<sup>58</sup> On Athens and Thrace see Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*; Z. Archibald, *The Odrysian Kingdom of Thrace: Orpheus Unmasked* (Oxford 1998); P. Schirripa (ed.), *I Traci. Tra l'Egeo e il Mar Nero* (Milan 2004).

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