
ZUIDHORN, De Gast 63

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This is an attempt to establish what Early Orphism was about, and what it was not about. Alderink (A.) first discusses earlier literature, both maximalistic and minimalistic, and the incompatibilities of its methodologies. He argues that one should not work either deductively or inductively with a definition of Orphism fully valid for all things Orphic, but rather with one that describes Orphism as a 'mood' or 'motif' common to various members of the Orphic family, however much these may be unlike one another in other respects. There is a reference to Wittgenstein's definition in terms of 'family resemblance' at p. 20. Using this fluid notion as a heuristic device, i.e., in order to establish which members do and which do not belong to a family, however, has its hazards, especially if we don't yet really know the family.

According to A., the Orphic 'religious mood' is characterized by two interconnected themes: (1) the presence of a cosmogony—or rather of a family of cosmogonies—invoking the idea that the world, as an expression of its divine creator(s), is essentially good, although things and people in the world are dominated by Time (Chronos, a God) and therefore necessarily temporary; (2) the presence of an anthropology involving that the soul is of a different
nature than the body which belongs to the world of Time. The soul, surviving the body, exists somewhere post-mortem; after death there is judgement and some souls are condemned to a dismal existence in Hades, while others go to a better place. During our lives, the body is the prison of the soul and the gods are our wardens; therefore it is not only good as a part of the world, but also because it is the means through which we are watched by the gods. Such evil as is found in the world was brought there by the Titans who killed, prepared, and consumed Dionysus. However, the Titanic element in our natures, according to A., is not our bodies but our tendencies to follow—unwittingly—the Titanic example. By avoiding bloodshed and the consumption of meat [while in prison, presumably] we become worthy of salvation. There is no evidence, A. argues, that the Orphics accepted metempsychosis.

This not un-attractive picture is, of course, in parts a highly subjective one and the evidence is not scrutinized with consistent rigour or with an in this context indispensable regard for chronology, although ch. 3, on the soul and salvation, is better than ch. 2, on the world. At any rate, A.'s attempt to reconstruct the details of the Orphic cosmogonical and cosmological theme is flawed in two ways: (1) his discussion of the Derveni papyrus is interesting but there is no consistent effort to distinguish between the ideas of the original poem on the one hand and those of the commentary on the other (25 ff.); (2) A. (36 ff.) enlists as 'Orphic' some cosmogonies which are not certainly Orphic and others which are certainly not. There is nothing Orphic about his first item, Eurip. fr. 484 (cf. Vorsokr. 59 A 62), and about that of Eudemus (Vorsokr. 1 B 12, the beginning) we only know that it put Night (not in Eurip.) at the beginning. That Aristoph., Av. 690 f. (Vorsokr. 1 A 12) is Orphic is dubious, and an early date for the so-called (cf. Vorsokr. 1 B 12) 'Rhapsodic Theogonies' is implausible. To claim that Ap. Rhod. I, 496 f. (Vorsokr. 1 B 16) is a piece of (pure) Orphism is preposterous, because the world-masses are separated (not, as A., 38, has it, 'separated and united') by Empedoclean Strife!); if Ap. Rhod., loc. cit., is 'Orphic', then Empedocles is 'Orphic' (Syrianus, In Met. 43, 12 says he is), quod non. Finally, the cosmogonies of Hieronymus and Hellanicus (Vorsokr. 1 B 13, first text) on the one hand and that of Athenagoras (ibid., second text) on the other are conflated in an inaccurate way (38), and Phanes is introduced into this compound without textual support. What follows upon this muddle, viz. a conceptual and structuralist (?)