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SOMA AND THE GREEK MYSTERIES

ZOROASTER

The religion of the Persians was Zoroastrian Mithraism (Mazdaism, named for the solar deity Ahura Mazda, “Lord Wisdom”). It was clearly the religion of the Achaemenid Dynasty.¹ Zoroaster (Zarathustra) was traditionally dated to 258 years before the fall of Persepolis to Alexander the Great in 330 BCE.² Zoroaster, however, merely meant “astrologer” and was a title of a priesthood, with a mythologized eponymous founder, and hence there would have been a succession of claimants to the name. The religion is probably more correctly dateable back to the mid second millennium BCE,³ contemporary with the time of Moses and the heretical Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten. It was the dominant religion of the Sassanid Empire until the Muslim conquest in 651 CE, and it still survives greatly diminished until today outside Iran as the religion of

¹ Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, 10.45, citing the fifth-fourth-century BCE Ctesias of Cnidus, a Greek physician at the Persian court Artaxerses Mnemon, and the fourth-century BCE historian Douris of Samos. Behistun Inscription, a multilingual inscription and large rock relief on a mountain cliff near Kermanshah in western Iran, an autobiography of Darius I, dated to sometime between his coronation in 522 BCE and his death in the autumn of 486. It contains the same text in three different cuneiform script languages: Old Persian, Elamite (the Pre-Indo-European language of Iran), and Babylonian (a variety of Akkadian). Like the Rosetta Stone for Egyptian hieroglyphics, it was crucial in the decipherment of a previously lost writing system.

² *Bundahishn*, an encyclopedic collection dating from the eighth and ninth centuries CE, reflecting ancient Zoroastrian and pre-Zoroastrian cosmological beliefs, with indications as well of post seventh-century CE Islamic Iran.

³ M. Boyce, *History of Zoroastrianism, Volume I: The Early Period* (Leiden: Brill, 1975). Martin Litchfield West, *The Hymns of Zoroaster: A New Translation of the Most Ancient Sacred Texts of Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris and Co., 2010). Plutarch (*De Iside and Osiride*, 46) dated the religion to five-thousand years before the Trojan War, which should probably be corrected to five-hundred.

the Parsi, primarily in India and southern Asia, but also elsewhere. The religion of the ancient Scythians was an archaic version of this same Indo-Aryan tradition, reflecting the pantheon (like Vedic Hinduism) before the monotheistic solar revisionism attributed to Zoroaster. It is argued that the Greeks knew little about Zoroaster or the religion except as a fanciful construct.⁴

This is not true, nor is it likely that the Greeks had no curiosity about neighboring peoples with whom they had frequent contact. Central to the religion was a psychoactive sacrament called *haoma*, the Persian equivalent of the Soma of Vedic Hinduism in the Indus Valley of modern Pakistan and northwestern India, both representing the religious tradition of the Indo-European peoples who migrated south from the Pontic steppes of the central Asiatic plateau, starting in the fifth millennium BCE. Soma was the deified intoxicating drink derived from a plant, characterized by no describable flower, branches, or roots. This lack of defining attributes, other than its tawny red color, seems applicable to no botanical specimen other than a fungus, and probably the species *Amanita muscaria*, which is richly documented in the folkloric tradition.⁵ Soma became a generic designation and other plants were employed as analogues. The barsom originally composed of a bundle of twigs and branches as an emblem of priestly empowerment (later replaced with rods of brass or silver) may suggest Syrian rue (psychoactive *Peganum harmala*),⁶ although often composed of tamarisk, pomegranate, or myrtle. Similarly, traces of cannabis have been found in sanctuaries presumably where the Soma ritual was performed.⁷ Until just a few decades ago, however, among the Kurdish ethnic Yezidi, a people marginalized and persecuted by the dominant Islamic culture, the Zoroastrian rite was still being performed with *Amanita muscaria* as the sacrament.⁸

The Roman fasces may be a related Indo-European analogue of the barsom, implicating rituals of mimetic flagellation of the sacrificial victim or initiate, as in Dionysian cultic enactments.⁹ The fasces are etymologically derived from the *fascinus* (cognate with “fascinate”) as a “magical spell,” implying psychoactive potential. The *fascinus* was personified as the deity Fascinus and was commonly represented as the phallus, suggesting that the original botanical specimen might resemble the erect male member. The *haoma* was sometimes identified as the resinous exudation of a tree, which implicates many other surrogates, including mistletoe, but such gummy exudations were

⁴ R. Beck, “Zoroaster v. as Perceived by the Greeks,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, available only at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/zoroaster-iv-as-perceived-by-the-greeks>, accessed 5 November 2018.

⁵ R. G. Wasson, *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968).

⁶ D. S. Flattery and M. Swartz, *Haoma and Harmaline, Near Eastern Studies Volume 21* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989). Critical response: J. Ott, *Pharmacothéon* (Kennewick, WA: Natural Products, 1993, 1996), chap. 6, especially note 11, 344-348. See C. A. P. Ruck, M. A. Hoffman, and J. A. González Celdrán, *Mushrooms, Myth, and Mithras: The Drug Cult that Civilized Europe* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2011), note, 5, 242-244.

⁷ Gonur Tepe sanctuary in the Bactrian-Margiana archaeological site in Turkmenistan, dating from the second millennium: V. I. Sarianidi, “The Soma-Haoma Problem,” *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies (EJVS)* 9, no. 1c (2003), <http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/merv/sarianidi.htm>, accessed 10 November 2016.

⁸ Ruck *et al.*, *Mushrooms, Myth, and Mithras*, 235-238 (“The Mirgia Mushroom Among the Mithraic Yezidi”).

⁹ A. Piper, “The Milk of the Goat Heiðrun: An Investigation into the Sacramental Use of Psychoactive Milk and Meat”: 211-278, in J. A. Rush, ed., *Entheogens and the Development of Culture: The Anthropology and Neurobiology of Ecstatic Experience* (Berkeley, CA: Atlantic Books, 2013).

considered the source of all mushrooms.¹⁰ Mistletoe itself is named as the “urine twig,”¹¹ implicating the urinous metabolite as a sacred effluent, and the mistletoe and the *Amanita muscaria* are equally fruits of their host tree, both thought to be inseminated by the bolt of lightning. Since the drinking of urine offers opportunity for derogatory pejorative prejudice, it is often the most secret and strenuously denied ritual.¹²

The Greeks themselves were part of this great migration starting at the end of the third millennium; they mythologized this original homeland as the realm of the Hyperborean people. The Greeks spoke a version of the same Proto-Indo-European language (PIE) and shared similar theological motifs. Darius invaded Greece in 490 BCE, followed by the second invasion led by his son Xerxes ten years later. The Persian kings never entered battle without their Magi priests. Before these invasions, the Greek colonies of Anatolia and the shore of the Black Sea were in contact with neighbors controlled by the Persians, and interaction with their Asiatic culture was responsible for the Ionian Enlightenment of the sixth century.¹³ In addition, prominent aristocratic political refugees from the Greek cities often sought asylum with Persian satraps or provincial governors and were initiated into their *haoma* sacrament. The Athenian Themistocles, who had led the victorious forces against Xerxes, later fell from power and was banished from the city. He sought asylum with Xerxes’ son Artaxerxes, and was awarded the governorship of Magnesia-on-the-Maeander in Asia Minor, where he died. The grateful subjects of his province erected a statue of him in the marketplace as Mithras, the bull-slayer, standing nude in the act of pouring a libation over an altar, below which lay the slain bull.¹⁴ In addition, the Thracians were commonly engaged as slaves in the Greek cities, from the custom of selling off their unwanted children into servitude. The slaves portrayed in Attic comedy often bear Scythian names. Scythians, moreover, were frequently employed as mercenaries, and the Scythians as foreign residents in Athens comprised the public police force. They brought with them their religion and its observances.

The Greeks knew of *haoma* as [*h*]ómomi (ὄμωμι), the same word, with characteristic loss of the initial aspiration.¹⁵ It was apparently known as early as the Homeric tradition as μῶλυ,¹⁶ the moly of the sorceress Circe, Medea’s aunt, with which Odysseus fended

¹⁰ Pliny, *Naturalis historia*, 22.96.1: *origo non nisi ex pituita arborum* (“no source except from the pitch of trees”).

¹¹ “Mistletoe” (and German *Mistel*) is derived from Sanskrit *mehati* (“he urinates”) and is cognate with Greek *omeich-ein* (“to urinate”), cognate with English “micturate.”

¹² R. G. Wasson, “The Miskwedo of the Ahnishinaabeg”: 3-12, in *Entheos: The Journal of Psychedelic Spirituality*, vol. 1, no. 2 (winter 2001), presenting the “Sun Mushroom Tale,” as narrated by the shaman Keewaydinoquay (Peschal). Keewaydinoquay (Peschal) (with an introduction by R. Gordon Wasson), *The Miskwedo in Anishinaabeg Life* (Verona: Stamperia Valdonega, 1984), from the hand-corrected master proof of the unpublished printing, of which only five copies exist, sequestered from access in the Wasson Archives, Harvard Library).

¹³ W. Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998, translated from the German, *Die orientalisierende Epoche in der griechischen Religion und Literatur*, Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1984).

¹⁴ Plutarch, *Themistocles*, 31; Diodorus Siculus, 11.58.

¹⁵ Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, 36 (369d-e).

¹⁶ H. Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery* (New York, NY: Biblio and Tannen, 1971, reprint of New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1963, translation from the German edition of Zurich: Rhein-Verlag, 1957), 179 *et seq.*

off her enchantment, and which figured in the Mystery religion tradition of the dwarfish ithyphallic crab-men grotesqueries known as the Kabeiroi (Κάβειροι).

The *haoma* sacrament of the Persians was associated with lycanthropy and the warrior bonding of their elite forces. In the funeral inscription of Darius at his grave in Naqsh-e-Rustam¹⁷ near Persepolis, at the end of the uppermost row in a list of twenty-nine countries that brought tribute appears the name *Saka Haomavarga*, which means the “Scythian *haoma*-wolves,” a confraternity of wolf-warriors bound by the sacrament.¹⁸ It is unlikely that they were unique in this regard. The lycanthropy is metaphoric for the state of altered consciousness induced by the *haoma* sacrament, probably suggested by the wolf’s fondness for ingesting the *haoma* plant. In this motif, other canines are interchangeable analogues. The Thracian/Scythian warriors customarily wore the pelt of foxes upon their heads.¹⁹ The metamorphosis of the warrior into a wolf upon the battlefield is documented as a literary motif in the Dolon episode of Odysseus’ encounter with the Thracian horseman Rhesus, as recorded in the Homeric tradition in book ten of the *Iliad*, and as staged in Euripides’ *Rhesus* tragedy.²⁰ For the Greeks, the metamorphosis was associated with Apollo. The fox pelt headgear was stylized as the red Phrygian cap, whose shape imitated the canine’s pointed snout. As the traditional headgear of the Thracian bacchants, who were called Βασσαριδες, for the βασσάρα “fox pelt,” it obviously was emblematic of ecstatic altered states of mind. The Thracian equivalent of Apollo’s twin sister Artemis was Bendis, and the deity was also often portrayed wearing the entire fox pelt as headgear. The bacchants were so costumed in Euripides’ *Bacchae* tragedy (405 BCE), and even earlier in the *Lycurgeia* tetralogy of Aeschylus, which makes it obvious that the symbolism was well known to the Athenian audience and was associated as well with Dionysus, the non-Olympian half-brother of Apollo and Artemis. A version of Dionysus among the Phrygians and Thracians was Sabazios, which merged his identity with Zeus and with the Thracian mounted horseman as deity, who is the model for Rhesus. Sabazios was worshipped with cultic Bacchic rites of ecstatic intoxication in the streets of Athens of the fourth century,²¹ and probably earlier as well.

The Athenian audience was also aware of *haoma* as the sacrament of the Persian military. In Aristophanes’ *Wasps* comedy (422 BCE), as the play opens, two Thracian slaves, posted on guard duty, induce a visionary sleep of Sabazios, designated by the metaphor of “tending cows,” which causes them to nod off, like a Persian military campaign

¹⁷ An ancient necropolis, about twelve kilometers northwest of Persepolis in Fars Province, Iran, with graves from both the Achaemenid and Sassanid periods, dating back to ca. 1000 BCE.

¹⁸ D. E. Gershenson, *Apollo the Wolf-God* (McLean, VI: *A Journal of Indo-European Studies Monograph*, no. 8, 1991), 84.

¹⁹ Herodotus, 7.75.

²⁰ Homer, *Iliad*, 10; Euripides, *Rhesus*; Vergil, *Aeneid*, 12; C. A. P. Ruck, B. D. Staples, J. A. G. Celdán, and M. A. Hoffman, *The Hidden World: Survival of Pagan Shamanic Themes in European Fairytales* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 87-124.

²¹ Demosthenes, *De corona*, 18.260.

marching across their eyelids.²² It is something they have done before, but never have the visions been so intense. The obscene routine is probably masturbatory.

- Hey, mother-fucker, what’re doing!
- I’m learning how to relieve the night watch.

The play ends with an obscene dance of children as Kabeiroi impersonating little pubic crabs around the gigantic erection of the carousing old juror, with the punning refrain of *μύκτηρ μυκᾶται*, the “snotty [so-called] nose is bellowing forth its ejaculate of mucus.” The mucus is the common descriptive attribute of the mushroom, as in the term mycology. The two Thracian slaves, and the Athenian audience, obviously know that the *haoma* sacrament of the Persian elite troops was metaphorically a bovine manifestation of their deity Sabazios.

In a similar scene in Aristophanes’ *Knights*, the two slaves bear the names of two Athenian politicians displaced from favor in the house of their master, Democracy. They attempt to relieve their suffering, first by fellatio, playing each other’s “flute,” then by perhaps “deserting” their duty, which in Greek is “come by yourself” or masturbation. Finally, they propose suicide, by a “manful” drink of bull’s blood, the way that Themistocles did it. Themistocles was, in fact, initiated by his Persian overlord as the Zoroastrian Mithras, but there is nothing lethal in a drink of bull’s blood, except in the scenario of initiation.²³ The two slaves drink the intoxicating drink straight, sucking off each other’s phallus “manfully.” A common metaphor for the male genitals was the wine sack. The drink again appears to nourish the mind with visionary inspiration.

In the *Clouds* (423 BCE), Aristophanes employed the Scythian cannabis fumigation tents,²⁴ which may represent the *haoma* ritual, as the paradigm for the parody of Socrates’ school for his pro-Spartan disciples.²⁵ Socrates was staged “high,” visibly dangling in a basket above the school, with his students identified as coals of burning resin, and above the chorus of *Clouds*, more exactly designated as “smoke,” with the obligatory comic phallus worn by these male dancers impersonating female deities identified as their “noses,” so that they get high by inhaling the smoky essence of their own nebulous state. When the Scythians emerge from the tents of their fumigation ritual, per Herodotus, they howl like wolves, and Aristophanes implies that the Spartan troops encircling and attacking the city in the Peloponnesian War are such packs of hostile wolves. It is likely that many members of the audience in the Theater of Dionysus had personally heard these ecstatically howling Scythians from those resident in Athens at their funeral rites. The lycanthropy induced by the cannabis may represent transposition from the tradition of the

²² C. A. P. Ruck, “The Great God Sabazios and the Crab Dance in Athens”: 193-220, in *The Stone Mushrooms of Thrace* (bilingual edition, English and Greek) (Alexandroupoli, Thrace-Greece: EKATAIOS, 2012).

²³ Ruck et al., *Mushrooms, Myth, and Mithras*, 77-86.

²⁴ Herodotus, 4.75.

²⁵ C. A. P. Ruck, “Aristophanes’ Parody of Socrates as a Pothead and the Spartan Warrior Cult of the Wolf”: 75-91, in J. H. Ellens, ed., *Seeking the Sacred with Psychoactive Sacraments*.

mushroom, perhaps reinforced by the resemblance of the fragrance of the resinous buds to the urine pheromone of canines.

The Spartan puberty indoctrination of their young men as wolves was an element in the organization of their government under their legendary lawgiver, Lycurgus, a name that designates him as “doing the work of a wolf.” The Scythians and the Dorian Greek tribal affiliation of the Spartans claimed a common mythical relationship through the legendary hero Heracles.²⁶ The Scythians maintained close affiliation with the Spartans,²⁷ and the Spartan king Cleomenes died *ca.* 489 BCE from his associating with Scythians and becoming accustomed to their manner of drinking what is called “wine undiluted with water,” which was termed the “Scythian style.”²⁸

Apollo was named for the Dorian word *ἀπέλλα*, designating the “assembly” of the people, the equivalent of the *ἐκκλησία* in Athens²⁹ (“group summoned together,” French *église*, which developed into the Christian “church,” the analogue of the Jewish “synagogue”), but *ἀπέλλα* implies the metaphor of a “herd” or “pack” of the herdsman. Νομός “pasturage, common feeding ground” as homonymous with νομός meaning “law, common usage” of civilized society provided the fundamental pun upon which Aristophanes constructed his *Birds* comedy (415 BCE).³⁰ The herdsman protects his flock from the predation of wolves. It is also the herdsman’s task, however, to cull his flock, and hence he is himself the wolf. Hence, Apollo’s name had the folk etymology that derived it from the verb to “destroy” (*ἀπόλλυμι*),³¹ and he and his sister Artemis were involved in traditions of human victims offered for sacrifice.

As such, Apollo in the persona of the wolf-god played a beneficial role in overseeing puberty initiations into the tribal brotherhoods organized as “packs” of males, eliminating the weak and unqualified. The more ancient manifestations of his persona as predatory wolf were involved in lycanthropy and its metaphoric ecstatic intoxication of “ravidity,” as in the annual war that Sparta declared upon their resident slave populaces, and in the warrior cults attested among the Thracians. The rabid animal turns upon its master, as in the myth of the death of Actaeon. A vase painting depicts the “ravidity” personified as Lyssa, the goddess of “madness,” literally the “she-wolf,” costumed with Thracian boots and a wolf headgear.³² At Sparta, moreover, the puberty initiate was required to spend a year as an outcast, living by thievery, during which time he was considered a wolf. After

²⁶ G. Hinge, “Scythian and Spartan Analogies in Herodotus’ Representation of Initiation and Kinship Groups”: 55-74, in P. G. Bilde, J. M. Højte, and V. F. Stolba, eds., *The Cauldron of Ariantas: Studies Presented to A.N. Scegllov on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday* (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus UP, 2003): http://www.pontos.dk/research/ra_1/publications/books/bss-1-files/BSS1_07_Hinge.pdf, accessed 11 November 2016.

²⁷ Herodotus, 6.84.2.

²⁸ Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistai*, 10.29 (427b-c).

²⁹ Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 6; Hesychius, *s.v.* *ἀπελάζειν*; substantiated in inscriptions, first century BCE, from Spartan Glytheion.

³⁰ W. Arrowsmith, “Aristophanes’ *Birds*: The Fantasy Politics of *Eros*”: 119-167, in *Arion*, new series, vol. 1, no. 1 (spring 1973).

³¹ Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1085-1086.

³² Actaeon attacked by his hounds, Attic red-figure bell *krater*, *ca.* 440, by the Lykaon Painter, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Caskey-Beazley, *Attic Vase Paintings* (MFA), no. 110: <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/mixing-bowl-bell-krater-153650>, accessed November 12 2016.

that ordeal, he was admitted into the wolf packs that comprised the army, thus enacting the two aspects of their patron, the wolf-god.

FUNGAL ZOOMORPHISM

The mythical association of the Mycenaean Perseus with Perses, the eponym of the Persians, and of the Corinthian Medea³³ and her son Medos, the alternative eponyms of the Medes, relates to the tradition of the *haoma* as the sacred mushroom, and its four major mythical representations in Greek tradition. These are [1] as an anthropomorphized zoomorphism known as the Gorgon Medusa, [2] the Golden Apple of the Hesperides, [3] the analogous Golden Fleece of Jason, and [4] the divinatory liver of Prometheus. It is also a fungal additive to the undiluted Thracian wine that rendered it so potent. This wine was known to the Homeric tradition as the Apollonian wine of Maron that Odysseus used to intoxicate the Cyclops Polyphemus.³⁴ The legendary wine required dilution with twenty parts water,³⁵ and it still existed in the Roman period, and by the testimony of the proconsul assigned to the province, it still required eight-fold dilution to be drunk safely.³⁶ This wine was associated with the religious initiation into the Mystery of the Kabeiroi, as practiced at several sites. A fifth-century red-figure hydria found in the cemetery of ancient Thracian Ainos (modern Enez, Turkey) depicts a cultic scene, in which a mushroom is being added, along with other plants, to a *πίθος* of wine.³⁷ The wine from the sanctuary on the island of Samothrace dedicated to the Great Gods appears to have been responsible for the wine marketed as Maronian in the Roman period.³⁸ Hence [5], the grotesque creatures associated with the Mystery initiations are also anthropomorphisms of the fungal sacrament.

Although the mushroom in Greece is associated with the arrival of the Indo-Europeans and the tradition of the *haoma* sacrament, traceable throughout Europe as the common Celtic and Nordic heritage of berserker warriors and fairy creatures and similar gnomish beings, there were analogous fungal sacraments already practiced in northern Africa and Europe well before their arrival, and they probably figured in the shamanic inauguration of the early Egyptian pharaohs,³⁹ assimilated into Ptolemaic Mysteries of Isis and Osiris. The rock paintings of Tassili n'Ajjer in the mountainous plateau of southern Algeria and in southern Spain date from the Neolithic. Most notable is the Algerian depiction of the antlered bee-faced shaman whose body is sprouting with mushrooms;⁴⁰ and the rock shelter at Selva Pasquale in Catalanian Spain, where the natural relief of

³³ Medea was the daughter of Aeëtes, king of Colchis at the far eastern shore of the Black Sea (in modern-day Georgia), but he was an emigrant from his native Corinth, of the lineage of Helios in the northern Peloponnesus.

³⁴ Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.193-255.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.208-211.

³⁶ Pliny, *Naturalis historia*, 14.53; cf. Pollux (second century CE), 6.10.

³⁷ Museum of Edirne, ancient Adrianopolis, uncovered in the archaeological investigation of 2011. C. A. P. Ruck, ed., *Dionysus in Thrace: Ancient Entheogenic Themes in the Mythology and Archaeology of Northern Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey* (Berkeley, CA: Regent Press, 2014), 257-262.

³⁸ Ruck, *The Great Gods of Samothrace and the Cult of the Little People*, 51-60.

³⁹ A. Puharich, *The Sacred Mushroom: Key to the Door of Eternity* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959).

⁴⁰ T. McKenna, *Food of the Gods* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1992), 72-73. Jean-Dominique Lajoux, *The Rock Paintings of the Tassili* (Cleveland, OH: World Publishing Co., 1963), 71, 72-73.

a large bull has been enhanced by painting, at a sanctuary that apparently functioned as a solstice marker, with an additional painted chorus line of anthropomorphized mushrooms dancing.⁴¹ As the fruit of the tree in Eden, the mushroom figured in ancient Judaism,⁴² and was perpetuated as a sacrament in early Christianity,⁴³ surviving as a secret of the elite into the Renaissance.⁴⁴ The ubiquity of the mushroom cult is perhaps explicable by considering the psychoactive botanical agent as itself functioning as the common denominator in communication with shamans.⁴⁵ Thus similar metamorphic motifs appear apparently spontaneously among unrelated peoples. The wolf metamorphosis with *Amanita muscaria* is documented as well for an elite group in the shamanism of the Huichol of North America.⁴⁶

BELLOWING BOVINES

There is no name for the mushroom in English, only metaphors. This is characteristic of things too sacred to name. Mushroom is one of those metaphors, assimilated as early as the Elizabethan era from the French *mousseron*, itself derived from Late Latin *mussare*, to “moo/bellow,” from Greek *μυκάεσθαι*, to “bellow.” Mushroom is onomatopoeic for this bellowing sound which as early as the Classical period of Greece mushrooms emitted as they sprouted from the ground.⁴⁷ The words for “mystery” (*μυστήριον*) and “initiate” (*μύστης*) have the same *mu* syllable, which was written with the glyph for a bullhead in the Mycenaean syllabary. It represents the voiced nasal labial, made with the lips pursed, emitting no sound, for a secret well kept, like the English “mum’s the word.” Rainfall, moreover, was seen as the seminal milk of heaven, as well as the urine and ejaculate of deity, representing a kind of sacred wedding, milk and semen together, milked from the udders of the heavenly herd of cows in an action interchangeable with masturbation, and caught on earth in fungal cups carved into the megalithic mushroom monuments now documented in Alpine Europe⁴⁸ and throughout Thrace, identifying the rainfall obviously with a divine potion of a mushroom.⁴⁹ The fungal identity of the herd of cloud formations was known to the Homeric tradition as the cattle of the Sun.⁵⁰ As Odysseus’ starving

⁴¹ B. P. Akers, J. F. Ruiz, C. A. P. Ruck, “A Prehistoric Mural in Spain Depicting Neurotropic Psilocybe Mushroom?”: 1-8, in *Economic Botany* 20, no. 10, 2011, <http://www.psilosophy.info/resources/562a1f5d08ae22b170316a67.pdf>, accessed 19 November 2016.

⁴² J. M. Allegro, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross: A Study of the Nature and Origins of Christianity within the Fertility Cults of the Ancient Near East* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1970).

⁴³ F. Fabbro, “Mushrooms and Snails in Religious Rituals of Early Christians at Aquileia”: 69-80, in *Eleusis*, new series, no. 3 (1999).

⁴⁴ Ruck *et al.*, *The Hidden World*.

⁴⁵ W. M. Geniusz, *Our Knowledge is Not Primitive: Decolonizing Botanical Anishinaabe Teachings (The Iroquois and Their Neighbors)* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 2009).

⁴⁶ M. Hoffman, “Huichol Wolf Shamanism and *A. muscaria*”: 43-48, in *Entheos: Journal of Psychedelic Spirituality*, vo. 1, no. 2 (winter 2001).

⁴⁷ Aristias (fifth-century BCE tragedian), frag. 6, probably from his *Perseus* tragedy, quoted in Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, 2.69B.

⁴⁸ F. Gosso and P. Webster, *The Dream on the Rock: Visions of Prehistory* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, SUNY Press, 2013).

⁴⁹ V. Markov, “Archaic Mushroom Monuments and Bulgarian Folkloric Motifs”: 183-198, in Ruck, ed., *Dionysus in Thrace*.

⁵⁰ Homer, *Odyssey*, 12.303-419. Ruck *et al.*, *The Hidden World*, 256-268.

men roasted the pieces of flesh on the spits, it began to bellow with the lowing of cattle, but the men ate the repulsive writhing and mooing bits. Bovine metaphors are frequent in the Persian *Avesta* and Sanskrit *Rig Veda* in identifying the *haoma*-Soma sacrament. The repulsiveness of bits of mooing flesh in the Homeric account indicates the taboo upon eating the sacred bellowing herd. This repulsive food, with the same referent, figures also in the “mushroom tables” defiled with the white scabby white harpy droppings that served as inspiring food for the Greek prophet Phineas in the tale of the Argonauts, and in Virgil’s account of the curse of the harpies and the edible tables⁵¹ that would signal the site where Aeneas would found the new city of Rome.⁵²

It would seem obvious to connect this bovine zoomorphism to the fact that the cow pie (disk of cattle dung) commonly serves as host for the psychoactive *Psilocybe* mushrooms.⁵³ All entheogenic mushrooms are probably analogous and interchangeable. Thus, the dancing mushrooms of the Selva Pasquale rock shelter probably belong to the psilocybin species,⁵⁴ and the liberty cap mushrooms (*Psilocybe semilanceata*), commonly called the “magic mushroom,” have inherited the symbolism of the Phrygian cap, although they are not red. The folkloric tradition, however, is well documented that the sacred mushroom imparts enhanced stamina, is the mycorrhizal fruit of its host tree, is red, with a cap spotted with white scabs, and is associated with flies. The altered vision and intoxication it accesses is commonly described with metaphors of lycanthropy, as in the folktale of *Rotkäppchen* (“Little Red-cap”),⁵⁵ whose red, so-called “riding-hood” is a version of the initiatory Phrygian cap. Both Mithras and his twin torchbearers could be depicted as only their heads, with Phrygian caps, hanging as the fruit of the host tree.⁵⁶ Among the North American Anishinaabeg, the *Amanita muscaria* is known as the “tree-mushroom” (*miskwedo*).

The cows in Greek mythology are constantly mooing in estrus, on the model of the zoomorphism of the cow-maiden Io, whose herdsman Argo metamorphosed into the cow-fly *Tabanus bovinus*, which is called οἶστρος (cognate with English “estrus”). In this form, he stings her womb with his cow-prod (βουπλήξ), like the “wolf-man” Lycurgus in his attack upon the Thracian bacchantes celebrating the mountain revel of Dionysus,⁵⁷ the deity of intoxication. The rabid she-wolf Lyssa commonly materialized amidst the female vixens of the revel.⁵⁸ In Aeschylus’ *Prometheus*, Io describes her torment, troubled with sexual dreams, as she started to grow her horns and metamorphosed into a cow, “anointed” (χρισθεῖσα, cognate with “chrism”) with the madness of the sharp-mouthed cow-fly (μύωψ), driven, “estrus-smitten” (οἶστροπλήξ) by the “divine whip”

⁵¹ Vergil, *Aeneid*, 3.254-257.

⁵² C. A. P. Ruck and R. Larner “Virgil’s Edible Tables”: 387-449, in Rush, ed., *Entheogens and the Development of Culture*. Lycophron, Alexandria, 1250-1252.

⁵³ V. P. Wasson and R. G. Wasson, *Mushrooms, Russia, and History* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1957), 244.

⁵⁴ The identification is based on the crooked stipes, but that may represent instead an attempt to depict them as dancing.

⁵⁵ Ruck et al., *The Hidden World*, 126-130.

⁵⁶ Ruck et al., *Mushrooms, Myth, and Mithras*, 62-65, 164. Frankfurt-Heddernheim Mithraeum. Dieburg Mithraeum, Vermaseren CIMRM 247.

⁵⁷ Homer, *Iliad*, 6.129 et seq.

⁵⁸ Euripides, *Bacchae*, 977 et seq.

(μάστιξ θεῖα) into uncontrollable dancing.⁵⁹ The metaphors were obviously understandable to the Athenian audience. Μύωψ as an alternative name for the οἴστρος is cognate with “myopic,” literally “squint-eyed,” implying not only altered vision, but also the pursed lips of a religious “mystery” (μυστήριον). In the myth about the sisters of Perseus, as they turned into bacchanalian cows, they experienced a dermatological affliction, turning red, splotched with white scabs, and ran around in what seemed a lewd manner to everyone who saw them.⁶⁰ Dionysus himself could materialize as a bull among them.⁶¹

THE GORGON MEDUSA

The Gorgons of Greek myth moored like cows.⁶² This is totally expectable since their “Queen” called the Medusa is a zoomorphism of the sacred mushroom. The hero Perseus harvested her head with a pruning hook (ἄρπη), the same implausible⁶³ agricultural tool that Mithras employed to slaughter the Cosmic Bull; and Perseus then placed it in a special receptacle, the κίβισις, a sack slung upon the arm, identifiable as what is still used today by people picking apples and other fruits. The ἄρπη and the κίβισις are depicted in numerous vase paintings. It is also traditional to depict that the pruning of the monster occasions her botanical metamorphosis into an olive tree, a tree that requires annual pruning to tame it from its wild state as a useless thicket and induce it to fruit. It also is a tree that serves as host for the *Amanita muscaria*.⁶⁴ In the myth of the hero Heracles, he harvested it as the golden antler of a female reindeer among the Hyperboreans of the Scythian steppes, and it metamorphosed into the olive tree as he returned from that realm, whereupon he planted it as the first grove of sacred olives in the Altis at the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia. The *Cervidae* are notably fond of mushrooms, including the Amanita’s metabolite in urine. The motif of the deer-hunt in medieval and Renaissance art probably always had the gathering of the mushroom as its referent. Both Saints Hubertus and Eustatius experienced a vision of the Christ suspended between the antlers of a stag while out on the hunt. In addition to the tauroctony, Mithras is depicted hunting deer.

From the severed neck of the Medusa emerged a flying horse, named Pegasus for the springs of magical, inspiring “fountains” (πηγή) that burst forth, analogous to the “water miracle” attributed to Mithras,⁶⁵ wherever it touches earth. The identity of the Medusa as a picked mushroom is explicitly recorded by the antiquarian second-century CE traveler Pausanias as a local version of the myth at Mycenae,⁶⁶ and it is so depicted

⁵⁹ Aeschylus, *Prometheus*, 674-682.

⁶⁰ Pausanias, 2.25.7. C. A. P. Ruck, “The Myth of the Lernaean Hydra”: 795-804, in S. Goffredo and Z. Dubinsky, eds., *The Cnidaria, Past, Present, and Future: The World of Medusa and her Sisters* (Switzerland: Springer, 2016).

⁶¹ Euripides, *Bacchae*, 918-921.

⁶² Eustathius, on *Iliad* 2.498; Stephanus of Byzantium, s.v. *Μυκάλη, Μυκῆναι*.

⁶³ The ἄρπη is not a scimitar, and its curved blade is not honed on its upper edge; it would be impossible to plunge it straight down into the back of the bull, as depicted in the Mithraic tauroctony.

⁶⁴ Wasson Archives, Harvard University; F. Angelis, Greek newspaper *Ἐλευθερία*, 1962: “On the pine trees and on the sacred olive there grow some big red mushrooms with a terrible poison.... The shepherds wonder how it comes about that the olive produces bad mushrooms.” D. E. Teeter, *Amanita Muscaria: Herb of Immortality*, chap. 11 (Ambrosia Society, 2007), <http://ambrosiasociety.org/ebook/download>, accessed 20 November 2016.

Confirmed by personal communications.

⁶⁵ Ruck et al., *Mushrooms, Myth, and Mithras*, 67-76.

⁶⁶ Pausanias, 2.16.2-6.

on a fourth-century BCE amphora surviving from Southern Italy.⁶⁷ In picking the mushroom at the site of Mycenae, Perseus was supposedly instrumental in causing the Perseus spring to flow as the water source in the cistern below the citadel and in reinterpreting the name of the city as derived from the μύκης (“mushroom,” a metaphor as “mucous”), instead of its previous designation as the place of the Μυκηναί sisterhood, whose queen was the Medusa. Such a previous matriarchal culture is proclaimed by the symbolism of the citadel’s Lion Gate, and in the mythical tradition of Clytemnestra’s conflict with Agamemnon. Perseus thus marks the imposition of the Indo-European sacrament upon the pre-existent Minoan-Pelasgian citadel. The depiction of the decapitation on the Southern Italian amphora places the event in the Garden of the Hesperides and identifies the severed head as a Golden Apple harvested from the tree, clothes Perseus with the Phrygian cap, and further glosses the cap and the severed head as mushrooms. The vase survives since it was apparently sequestered in a tomb and suggests that the deceased was privy to its religious symbolism.

In 1975, the art historian Stella Kramrisch, a specialist in Indian art and Hinduism, who held the professorship of South Asian Art at the University of Pennsylvania and was a curator at the Pennsylvanian Museum of Art, demonstrated that one of the first surrogates for Soma was a mushroom, not a psychoactive variety, but chosen for its symbolism as a mediator between death and spiritual transcendence.⁶⁸ Its corpse-like putrid stench was transmuted into fragrance in the firing of a ritual clay vessel, which represented the decapitated head of the deity Makha, analogous to the fungal materialization of the Greek Gorgon. One of the earliest depictions of the Gorgons occurs on a colossal seventh-century πίθος urn that once served as a grave monument along the sacred road to the Mystery sanctuary of Eleusis.⁶⁹ It depicts them with pots for heads, suggesting that the pot-headed females were anthropomorphisms of the potion that was the original content of the vessel. From late antiquity (fifth-sixth century CE) survives an account that Perseus invented the Zoroastrian religion. He made a “skull-cup” (σκύφος) from the head of a hideous Libyan girl named Medusa and consecrated it with mystical power.⁷⁰

The decapitation of the Medusa represents an aspect of the transition of the goddess Athena to her pacified Olympian identity. She wears the Gorgon head as a commemoration of her former matriarchal role. For her rebirth as the daughter of Zeus, her father swallowed her pregnant mother when, during a succession of bestial metamorphoses, she materialized as a cow fly.⁷¹ When Jason and the Argonauts visited the Tree of the Golden Apples, on the

⁶⁷ Pergamonmuseum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antiken-Sammlung, inv. no. F. 3022, third quarter of the fourth century BCE. Ruck, “Documentation”: 85-136, in R. G. Wasson, A. Hoffmann, and C. A. P. Ruck, *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978; reprinted and enlarged 20th anniversary edition, Los Angeles: Hermes Press, 1998; 30th anniversary edition, Berkeley, CA: Atlantic Books, 2008), plate 7. A.D. Trendall, *The Red-Figured Vases of Lucania, Campania, and Sicily* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 67), chap. 16, no. 335. Strangely this vase is not discussed in S. M. Serfontein’s otherwise very informative survey of the depictions of the Perseus myth: *Medusa: From Beast to Beauty in Archaic and Classical Illustrations from Greece and South Italy*, MA thesis, Hunter College of the City University of New York, 1991.

⁶⁸ S. Kramrisch, “The Mahāvira Vessel and the Plant Pūtika”: 222-235, in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 95, no. 2 (April-June, 1975), reprinted 95-116, in Wasson *et al.*, *Persephone’s Quest*.

⁶⁹ Eleusis Museum, Greece.

⁷⁰ John Malalas, a Christian chronographer, whose source was probably the fourth century CE (?) historian Pausanias of Antioch. D. Ogden, *Perseus* (London/New York: Routledge, 2008), 111 *et seq.*

⁷¹ Hesiod, *Theogony*, 886, with scholiast, quoting a variant wording.

day after Heracles, who also fetched its fruit and slew the serpent guarding its trunk, they found the tail of the serpent still writhing from the toxins of the hero's arrows, but its head was dead, with flies dried up in the rotting wounds.⁷²

GOLDEN FLEECE

"Fleece" and "apple" are homonymous in Greek (μῆλον),⁷³ and the Golden Fleece of the sacrificed magical ram Χρυσόμηλος hung on the Tree in Medea's Colchis is an analogue of the Hesperides tree, traditionally located in the region of the Straits of Gibraltar and the Atlas Mountains of the northern African coast. It was an apple from that Tree which was also the first cause of the war fought at Troy.⁷⁴ In antiquity, Iberia was both the name for the Roman province of Spain (derived from the Celtic name for the Ebro River) and fortuitously also for the region at the far end of the Black Sea, inland from Colchis (modern Georgia, derived from an ancient Caucasian or Colchian word). Medea is an adjectival version of the same queenly designation as occurs as a verbal participle in Medusa (μηδοῦσα), and (with a different verb) as verbal participle in the name of Ion's mother at Athens as Κρεοῦσα (Kreousa, Creusa). Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece is an analogue of the exploit of the heroes Perseus and Heracles in the Hesperides.

Jason (Greek Ἰάσων) is a name like Ion, formed upon the homonymous word for "arrow" and "toxin" (ἰός), which yields also ἰατρός as doctor or "drug-man," and the name of Ἴαμος, the eponymous founder of the brotherhood of shamans who practiced at the sanctuary of Olympia.⁷⁵ Jason was named for the protective chrismation that Medea compounded to protect him from the serpent guarding the tree.

THE DIVINATORY LIVER OF PROMETHEUS

As Apollonius Rhodius narrated the episode of the chrismation in his Hellenistic epic, the *Argonautica*,⁷⁶ Medea picked a special plant for the compounding. It sprang from the earth, the primordial botanical growth (πρωτοφυής), sprouting from the ἰχώρ that dripped from the immortal liver of Prometheus, as it was gnawed by the eagle that visited him each day, chained to the mountain in the Caucasus, eternally in torment as the punishment demanded by Zeus for his creation of man. *Ichor* was the fluid that flowed in the veins of the gods instead of blood. Since the liver is essential for life, the largest and weightiest of the entrails and containing the greatest amount of the life force in the form of blood, it was considered the center of personal existence. The markings of the universe could supposedly be read off its surface, and thus it was a microcosm of the vitality of the celestial realm.⁷⁷ Prometheus is the mythical prototype of the clairvoyant seer, named for his "Fore-thought" or prognostication. The liver was considered the primordial organ

⁷² Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, 4.1400 *et seq.*

⁷³ So acknowledged in Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, 4.1390 *et seq.* The homonym is elaborated in Diodorus Siculus, 4.26.2, where the Serpent is the name of a herdsman who is guarding a flock of golden sheep. The serpent of the Hesperides and the one at Colchis are equated in Philostratus, *Imagines*, 2.17.

⁷⁴ Apollodorus, *Epitome*, 3.2.

⁷⁵ Ruck, "On the Sacred Names of Iamos and Ion."

⁷⁶ Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, 3.838 *et seq.*

⁷⁷ Etruscan bronze liver, marked as a celestial map (*ca.* 100 BCE) labeled with the names of the gods controlling each area. Piacenza Museo Civico, Piacenza, Italy.

of the body, the part that developed first in the fetus, around which the rest of the person grew in the womb. It is the organ that functions in hemolysis, the cleansing of the blood from toxins, and thus it is a motif in botanical agencies for shamanic rapture. Although it is unlikely that the ancients knew of the filtering function of the liver, it was thought to be the organ through which the digested food from the stomach entered the bloodstream. The liver would have the highest concentration of psychoactive toxins, reabsorbing what the kidneys did not eliminate into the urine. The theft of fire, hidden in the narthex, involves the motif of root-cutters and herb-gatherers. The narthex was the emblem of the Dionysian bacchantes as the receptacle for the plants gathered, named as the “narcotic-storehouse.”⁷⁸ The narthex was interchangeable with the thyrsus. The latter in common culinary nomenclature was also the word for the stipe of the mushroom, which was an analogue of the drug repository.⁷⁹ In the case of the *Amanita muscaria*, the psychoactive chemical is confined mainly to the red rind of the cap, making it a perfect example of the toxic agent stuffed into the stalk of the narthex. Its redness, moreover, would suggest the glowing embers of the fire stolen from heaven, since the narthex was used to transport fire from one hearth to another. The bitter brownish or greenish-yellow secretion of the liver called bile or gall (Latin *bilis*, Greek γολή, both derived from the Indo-European root *ghel-* for “shine,” yellow like “gold,” with which it is cognate) is another element in this motif. It is listed as two of the basic humors of the body (melancholic, choleric) and was associated in Roman thought with rancor and madness. “Gall” was further implicated in the motif of psychoactive toxins by its association with the venom of serpents, which it was thought contaminate plants by contagion. Eating your enemy’s liver was equivalent to mastering his soul. The flesh of animals that have eaten toxins is contaminated with those toxins,⁸⁰ and the liver of Prometheus would encapsulate the essence of his visionary mentality.

The liver of Prometheus and the magical plant that sprouted from it is the fare of eagles. In indigenous North American tradition, the eagle is the thunderbird, nourished by the *Amanita muscaria*.⁸¹ In the case of quails, which are immune to many deadly toxins, the flesh can be fatal to humans, and it was recognized in antiquity as the source of “quail madness” (ὄρτυγομανία), considered the same seizure as the sacred disease of epilepsy.⁸² The motif occurs in the European and Arabic folkloric identification of the *Amanita muscaria* as “raven’s bread.”⁸³ The folk name was well-known and was depicted in works of Renaissance art,⁸⁴ and is recorded as the food that fed the prophet Elijah in

⁷⁸ Theophrastus, *Historia plantarum*, 9.12.2.

⁷⁹ Apicius, *De re culinaria* (third-fourth-century CE cookbook), 7.15.6. C. A. P. Ruck, *Sacred Mushrooms of the Goddess: Secrets of Eleusis* (Berkeley, CA: Ronin Publishing, 2006), 85 *et seq.* Ruck *et al.*, *Dionysus in Thrace*, 29-34.

⁸⁰ Piper, “The Milk of the Goat Heiðrun,” in Rush, ed., *Entheogens and the Development of Culture*.

⁸¹ Keewaydinoquay (Peschal), *The Miskwedo in Anishinaabeg Life*.

⁸² Pliny, *Naturalis historia*, 10.69.

⁸³ E. Klapp, “Raven’s Bread and Other Manifestations of Fly Agaric in Classical and Biblical Literature”: 333-342, in Rush, ed., *Entheogens and the Development of Culture*. Ruck *et al.*, *The Hidden World*, 32-44.

⁸⁴ Saints Anthony of Egypt and the hermit Paul of Thebes, fed by Raven’s bread, Grünewald’s Isenheim Altarpiece, innermost presentation, left panel (1512-1516 CE).

the desert.⁸⁵ Raven (*Corax*) was the initial stage in the seven personae of the initiation in Zoroastrian Mithraism. It represented the sin of incarnation, the soul's thirsty absorption of water like a sponge or fungus, imprisoning celestial fire in the wetness of matter. The Raven served as cupbearer at the final divine banquet, and he delivers the initial command to slaughter-harvest the cosmic "bull" for the final liberating sacrament of heavenly bread. Mithraic iconography identifies the so-called bovine flesh as Raven's bread, with the bird seen pecking at bits of the "bull," and equates Raven to the symbolism of the Phrygian cap.⁸⁶ The metaphor of bread involves the concept that heaven was something heaved up, expanding with its fungal leavening to create the outer crust of the cosmos. The crossed legs of the two Mithraic torchbearers symbolized the entrapment of matter (a pose that Perseus often also assumes in vase paintings), but the cross was also incised on the sacramental loaves of bread, signifying the intersection of the equatorial belt of the zodiac and the solar elliptic, which traced the retrograde precession of the equinoxes, as time moved toward the dawning of a new age every 26,000 years. Mithraic symbolism marked the end of the Age of Taurus as it moved into the Age of the Ram Aries. Astrology had as its basic premise that the worlds above and below were interconnected and reciprocally influenced, which is also the motif exemplified in the divinatory liver.

Medea cut the root of this Promethean plant amid the sound of bellowing and mooing from the earth, and it is described as growing with a double stem (καῦλος δίδυμος), not a branching stem. It is, more exactly, a "twin" stem. The epithet of the Dioskouroi was the "Twins," Δίδυμοι, and they became the constellation Gemini. This encodes a riddle since no plant grows from the earth with a twinned stem, side by side, except the Amanitas. As the subterranean nodule or egg that develops from the mycelium into the fruiting mushroom expands, the stem or stipe/trunk extends in both directions, pushing the base apart from the cap, shattering the eggshell, producing a shape like a dumbbell, easily recognizable when plucked from the ground. It is also the traditional shape of the sacred thunderbolt that inseminated the mushroom at its conception from the heavens, enmeshing celestial fire in the wet matrix of matter. The thunderbolt of Zeus in this dumbbell shape, often with conventional lightning flashes attached and sometimes with wings, is the Greek version of the *vajra* thunderbolt of Indra, and in Buddhism it is symbolic of the thunderbolt experience of *Bodhi* or "awakening."⁸⁷

When she cut the root, it was like "newly cut flesh" (σάρξ νεοτμήτος) and the Titan chained to the mountain groaned, as if she were harvesting him. It is further described as like the "Corycian crocus" (Κωρύκιος κρόκος). This implicates lycanthropy. The Corycian cave is Apollo's Wolf Cave on Mount Parnassus (identified by the rock formation resembling a wolf beyond its entrance) above the sanctuary of Delphi, where Xuthus believes he begot his son Ion, the eponym of the Ionian tribal group, in a bacchanalian revel, whereas Ion is actually his mother's son, conceived as the Queen Kreousa (Medusa) gathered petals of

⁸⁵ 1 Kings 17.6.

⁸⁶ Ruck *et al.*, *Mushrooms, Myth, and Mithras*, 119 *et seq.*

⁸⁷ C. A. P. Ruck, "Mushroom Sacraments in the Cults of Early Europe": 68-93, in *Neuroquantology*, vol. 14, no. 1 (March 2016): <http://www.neuroquantology.com/index.php/journal/article/viewFile/897/749>, accessed 16 November 2016.

crocus into her lap (vulva), flowers that materialized as her divine inseminator Apollo.⁸⁸ Ion was of autochthonous lineage, abandoned as an infant. Kreousa wears two drops of Gorgon blood, of opposite efficacy, suspended in vials from her bracelet, and she placed the infant in a basket with tokens of his autochthony, golden serpents and a tapestry she wove depicting the decapitated head of the Medusa. These details make clear that the playwright Euripides conceived of Kreousa as an analogue of the Medusa herself.⁸⁹

DIOSKOUROI (DIOSCURI)

The twin sons of Zeus called Δίδυμοι (Didymi), Gemini, and Dioskouroi (Διόσκουροι) hatched from a single egg and wore the half eggshells as their skull caps or pileus, the cap of the mushroom, which as a metaphor obviously implies a little creature below wearing it. In botanical lore, they were associated with this so-called crocus.⁹⁰ The Dioskouroi could also be depicted as two aniconic posts, representing the half eggshells of the curved red caps, joined by a crossbeam, as if they were conjoined twins, before their separation. In this configuration, they resembled their cousins, the Moliones, who were similarly hatched from a single egg, but joined at the waist as conjoined twins. They are the mythical prototype of the spherical primordial humans that were sliced in half like an egg in Aristophanes' fanciful tale of the Hermaphrodite in Plato's *Symposium*. The Dioskouroi were commonly identified as presiding in the Mystery religion of the Great Gods on the island of Samothrace, with its sacrament of Maronian wine. They were customarily imagined as idealized male adolescents, but there were other analogous and interchangeable versions of these patrons of the Mystery.

As the Corybants, they were still idealized as male youths, the warriors who clashed their shields to obscure with their din the cries of the infant Zeus at his birth in the cave on Crete. This is the myth that signals the birth of Zeus as the replacement for the divine child of Minoan tradition; it is the tale of his rebirth into his new identity, that will replace the Goddess with his family of evolving Olympian deities. Typically, the Corybants were depicted characteristically dancing, with one foot raised, and with their shields uplifted above their heads. It was a pose also used to depict Mithras.⁹¹ In the second-century CE Lucian's burlesque of a traveler's memoirs titled a *True History*, a fantasy account of a trip to the moon, these Corybants with uplifted shield were parodied, among various tribes of fantastic creatures, revealed in their fungal identity as tiny beings, the Καυλομύκητες, "Cover-stem Mushrooms."⁹² They are a tribe of mushroom warriors, whose cap is employed as the shield above their heads.⁹³ For weapons, they use stalks of asparagus, a botanical metaphor for their monstrous ithyphallic state. Asparagus is slang

⁸⁸ Euripides, *Ion*, 881.

⁸⁹ C. A. P. Ruck, B. D. Staples, and C. Heinrich, *The Apples of Apollo: Pagan and Christian Mysteries of the Eucharist* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2001), 54 *et seq.*

⁹⁰ Pseudo-Dioscorides, 1.26.

⁹¹ Ruck *et al.*, *Mushrooms, Myth, and Mithras*, 108.

⁹² Ruck and Hoffman, *The Effluents of Deity*, 278-283, on the caul, which in Latin was called *caput galeatum*, "helmet-head."

⁹³ Lucian, *Vera historia*, 1.16.

for “penis,” probably suggested by the odor it imparts to urine, as well as its obvious obscene shape. It was reputed to have efficacy as an aphrodisiac.

KABEIROI (CABIRI)

These obscene mushroom anthropomorphisms reveal the natures of analogous other creatures of the Mystery, where no attempt was made to idealize them as youths. Among them were the δάκτυλοι (dactyls), materialized as “fingers” as Rhea grasped the earth in birthing Zeus. They obviously were quite small creatures, but the dactylic metaphor implies the obscenity of their ithyphallic “fingers.”⁹⁴

Samothace is a volcanic island, implying the metallurgy of Hephaestus at the alchemical subterranean forge of spiritual transcendence at its molten caldera. The Mystery creatures were also identified as the deity’s assistants.⁹⁵ Among these were the Telchines, who were reputedly great wizards (θέλγειν “enchant”), but with bodies as seals, the equivalent of the selkies of Celtic lore.⁹⁶ They also were thought to have metamorphosed from Actaeon’s hounds and thus are involved in the motif of lycanthropy,⁹⁷ and certain of their names suggest that they were werewolves. Since the hind limbs of the seal are bound together, causing it to drag its way forward, rocking back and forth, leaving a zigzag trail like a serpent, they appear drunken. The Homeric seal-herder Proteus (designated as the “first-born”) was renowned for his clairvoyance.⁹⁸ His name is responsible for the adjective “protean” in English, and he could even metamorphose into a plant.

The Cyclopes (the tribal brothers of the Polyphemus whom Odysseus intoxicated with the potent Samothracian wine of Maron) were another grouping, characterized as great lovers of drunkenness, and with a single eye, another metaphoric fungal anthropomorphism. Although Polyphemus was monstrously huge, gigantism has its complement in miniscule creatures, indicative of the oscillating experience of macro and microscopic vision accessed with the *Amanita muscaria*, as popularized in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), with the key of the door to the fairy world beyond.⁹⁹ The giant Antaeus, whom Heracles defeated, had tiny pygmy brothers,¹⁰⁰ who are the referent for Jonathan Swift’s Lilliputians in *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726).¹⁰¹ In mythopoeia, the alternating gigantism and dwarfism is descriptive of the male erection.

These creatures were all interchangeable with the Kabeiroi, who were of both sexes, but equally obscene, the males with a gross erection, and the females tending the loom, whose “comb” (κτερίς) that holds the threads apart to admit the oscillating penetration of

⁹⁴ J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1975), 114, 115, 138, 213.

⁹⁵ Statius (first century CE), *Thebaid*, 2.265 *et seq.* M. Detienne and J.-P. Vernant, *Les ruses de l’intelligence: La mêtis des Grecs* (Paris: Flammarion, 1974).

⁹⁶ From Old English *seolh* meaning “seal.” L. Spence, *The Minor Traditions of British Mythology* (New York, NY: Benjamin Blom, Inc./Ayer Publishing, 1948), 55.

⁹⁷ Eustathius on Homer *Iliad*, 18.535.

⁹⁸ Homer, *Odyssey*, 412 *et seq.*

⁹⁹ T. A. Theis, *Legally Stoned* (New York, NY: Citadel Press, 2009), 22.

¹⁰⁰ Philostratus, *Imagines*, 2.22.

¹⁰¹ J. B. Marciano, *Toponymy: An Atlas of Words* (New York/London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 64. Giovanni di Lutero / Dosso Dossi (ca. 1486), *Hercules and the Pygmies*, Alte Galerie, Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, Austria.

the shuttlecock, is the female counterpart to the phallus as a sacred replica of the vulva.¹⁰² The Kabeiroi were depicted as pygmies, no larger than a thumb, the dactylic finger people, popularized as the *Tale of Tom Thumb* (1621).¹⁰³ The dwarfish African grotesqueries of the Mystery creatures existed in Greek mythical tradition, named as the fingers as of the fist (pugilist), before reports of the actual tribe in Africa, and then applied to them, derived from the *πυγμή*, the length of a cubit. Hephaestus was considered their father by a selkie seal mother or at least their divine ancestor,¹⁰⁴ and they inherited their drunken gait from their metallurgist patron, who was maimed, with feet turned backwards.¹⁰⁵ The lameness was metaphoric of the difficulty in ambulation when impeded by the gigantism of the erection.¹⁰⁶ Aristophanes staged them as the doubled chorus of obscene males and females in his *Lysistrata* comedy (411 BCE).¹⁰⁷ The Kabeiroi were explicitly identified as “crabs,”¹⁰⁸ which walk sidewise. Hence, like the folkloric motif of the dwarfs and like figures from the land of the fairy people, they could be expected to display backward feet.¹⁰⁹ Hephaestus was traditionally depicted carrying the pincers with which he manipulated the metal in his forge,¹¹⁰ and the clawed arms of his Kabeiric assistants provided the name for the tool as the “crab” (κάρκινος).

THE PRIMORDIAL PLOWMAN

These fungal anthropomorphisms represented the pre-agricultural world, the wilderness where they are found growing spontaneously, without cultivation and with no discernible seeds, a totally wild growth. Mushrooms belong to neither the animal nor botanical realms, but they represent a unique category.¹¹¹ The intermediary status of the mushroom’s classification is reflected in its abundant occurrences in folkloric tradition, where it functions as the ultimate mediator between oppositional forces and concepts. This dichotomy inevitably suggests the divide between the realms of life and death, and the mushroom lends itself readily to zoomorphism and anthropomorphic materializations as guides or modes of transport across the intervening frontier between realms of existence. Thus, they function like catalysts or henchmen in the service of the volcano’s divine blacksmith for the alchemical ennobling of the baser metals of the soul,¹¹² symbolic of transcendence from primordial man to civilized modes of culture. The smelter’s vessel,

¹⁰² A dwarfish, black Circe, abandoning her loom, presents the ithyphallic and black Odysseus, wearing the Phrygian cap, with the potion. Boeotian σκύφος, 450-420, British Museum,

¹⁰³ *The Cornish Thumb Chronicles*, the first collection of fairytales printed in English.

¹⁰⁴ Strabo, *Geographica*, 10.3.21; Stephanus of Byzantium, *s.v. Κάβειρα*.

¹⁰⁵ Hesiod, *Theogony*, 925: ἀμφιγυήεις. So depicted, riding an ass, both feet turned backwards, in a bacchanalian scene, Caeretan black-figure ὑδρία (ca. 530 BCE), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, cat. no. 3577.

¹⁰⁶ Henderson, *The Maculate Muse*, 111.

¹⁰⁷ Ruck, *The Great Gods of Samothrace*, 209 *et seq.*

¹⁰⁸ Hesychius, *s.v. Κάβειροι*.

¹⁰⁹ C. De Ciantis, *The Return of Hephaestus: Reconstructing the Fragmented Mythos of the Maker*, PhD thesis, Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2005.

¹¹⁰ Attic red-figure σκύφος, ca. 430-420 BCE, attributed to the Kleophon Painter, Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH, cat. no. 1982.88, Beazley arch. no. 11777: The return of Hephaestus to Olympus.

¹¹¹ V. N. Toporov, “On the Semiotics of Mythological Conceptions about Mushrooms”: 295-357, in *Semiotica*, vol. 53, no. 4 (1985).

¹¹² Plato, *Republic*, 3.414e-414c, the “noble lie” (γενναῖον ψεῦδος).

which was the maternal womb of creation,¹¹³ links agricultural fertility and the warfare of soldiery since the two main products of the metallurgist's forge are the tools for farming and the weapons of war.¹¹⁴

Another of the creatures of the Mystery was the primordial plowman. In Etruscan tradition, he was customarily linked with the aged tiny oxymoronic child named Tages,¹¹⁵ who popped up in front of the primordial farmer's plowshare and taught him the art of divination by the markings on the liver.¹¹⁶ The plowman and the dwarfish creature who sprouts from the land in front of him not yet furrowed by the blade are complementary aspects of the same entity. Tages was either autochthonous or the child of the personified creative spirit called Genius,¹¹⁷ who was usually depicted with the wings characteristic of the Celtic fairies¹¹⁸ and who inspired the norms of civilization and its ritual procedures, linking them to the realm of nature and the cosmos. An early-third-century BCE small bronze figure of a child, presented as an antique treasure to Pope Clement XIV in 1771, is thought to represent Tages.¹¹⁹ It depicts him as an infant, seated on the ground, one thigh horizontal, the other with knee raised, exposing his penis, and with his head incongruously as a wise old man turned upward toward the heavens. He has a pouch or *bullā* suspended as a locket around his neck, of the sort that Roman male children customarily wore as a protective amulet, usually containing phallic symbols, until the age of visible puberty and then stored as a memento of the moment of access to male sexuality and brought out for display at special adult honorary occasions.

Thus, the idealized identity of Tages is nevertheless essentially ithyphallic, like the Kabeiroi. Virgil in the *Aeneid* developed an ancient arcane tradition that the Etruscans were Trojans, descended from Dardanus, who was cited as one of the founders of the Mystery of the Kabeiroi. Although the Penates of historical times were depicted as idealized young males, they were always figurines, not life-sized statues, miniature males, and the supposed antique originals that Aeneas carried out of Troy and were stored, probably as a pious forgery, in a temple in the Roman suburbs on the Tiber once in former times resembled the obscene grotesqueries of the Mystery. As guardians of the household, they fulfil the same role as the Dioskouroi at Sparta, alternating on successive days between the life and death that they vowed to share together as loving brothers.

At Samothrace and elsewhere that similar Mystery rites were celebrated, the primordial plowman had the name of Iasion or Iasos or Iasus (a doublet of Medea's Ἰάσων/Jason). He coupled sexually with Demeter in the plow field, and was killed by a thunderbolt from Zeus. It was claimed by male chauvinist sources that it was an outrageous indignant assault upon

¹¹³ S. Blakely, *Myth, Ritual, and Metallurgy in Ancient Greece and Recent Africa* (Cambridge, UK/ New York, NY: Cambridge UP, 2006).

¹¹⁴ M. Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structure of Alchemy* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1978, reprint of Rider and Co., 1968).

¹¹⁵ N. Thomson de Grummond, *Etruscan Myth, Sacred History, and Legend* (Philadelphia, PN: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2006), 23-27.

¹¹⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 15.553-559.

¹¹⁷ Festus, *De verborum significatu*, 359.14.

¹¹⁸ Red-figure *oinochōē*, ca. 320 BCE, from Magna Graecia, British Museum, London: winged Genius facing a woman with a tambourine and mirror.

¹¹⁹ Museo Gregoriano Etrusco, Vatican, Rome, inv. no. 12108.

her chastity,¹²⁰ but actually she appears to have been quite willing;¹²¹ and Calypso in the *Odyssey*, when she is forced to relinquish her beloved hero, cites the affair of Demeter and Iasion as an example of how the gods always begrudge the female deities the enjoyment of their lovers.¹²² There was also a tradition that Iasion never did lay sexual hands upon Demeter and that it was all a misunderstanding of his having merely received the rites of the Mystery from the goddess and her daughter Kore/Persephone;¹²³ Demeter merely taught him the art of agriculture. There was even a tradition that the lightning bolt, in fact, never did destroy Iasion, but they journeyed together forever teaching how to “plow the field.” Demeter/Ceres in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, complains about him growing old with gray hair.¹²⁴

Iasion was a brother of Dardanus, and the two are cited as the original Kabeiroi,¹²⁵ and hence they must have been characteristically ithyphallic and quite sexually attractive to the goddesses. The ceremonial plow was probably phallic in its shape or ornamentation. It was certainly that in its symbolism. The penetration of the ground with a sharpened object, originally just a pointed stick of wood pulled or pushed along by the plowman, replaced by the metallurgist’s improved implement, is suggestive of primordial copulation, and it was the custom to make the bridal bed in the plow field for the consummation of the marriage, still commemorated in the baking of the “wheaten” wedding cake, ornamented with the marriage couple in the flowering bower. The “plow” (ἄροτρος) was the penis and so recognized in the legal wording of the formal marriage contract in Athens for the “plowing of legitimate children.”¹²⁶

The sexuality of plowing is fully developed in Sophocles’ *Women of Trachis* (*Trachinae*). Heracles’ wife Deianeira describes herself as a field on the far margin of a farmer’s estate that he visits rarely, only to plow her and then reap the crop. She later admonishes the chorus of maidens for their sexual inexperience: they are a field that has never yet felt the impregnating fall of rain or the heat of the sun.¹²⁷ In Egyptian, the glyph for the phallus represents the hoe or the plow. In contemporary slang, “to plow her field” is an obscenity, and ancient comedy developed the theme of the husband with an erection who needs to strip and work the land. In Sophocles’ *Antigone*, Creon tells Ismene that his son Haemon doesn’t need his intended bride, but has other fields to plow.¹²⁸ The obscene f-word in English has a plausible etymology that traces it back to Germanic *Pflug* for “plow.” An antique vase discovered in an archaeological excavation near Florence, Italy, depicts a row of six males with erections carrying a plow.¹²⁹

¹²⁰ Hesiod, *Eoiae* (*Catalogue of Women*), frag. 102 (*Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 1359, frag. 2); Pseudo-Apollodorus, 3.138.

¹²¹ Pseudo-Hyginus, *Astronomica*, 2.22; *Fabulae*, 270.

¹²² Homer, *Odyssey*, 5.125-129.

¹²³ Eustathius, on *Odyssey*, 5.125.

¹²⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 9.422-423: *queritur canescere...Iasona Ceres* (“Ceres complains that Jason is going gray”).

¹²⁵ Servius, on Vergil, *Aeneid*, 3.167; 7.207; Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, 1.917. scholia.

¹²⁶ T. R. Martin, *Ancient Greece from Prehistoric to Hellenistic Times* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1996).

¹²⁷ Sophocles, *Trachinae*, 31-33; 142 *et seq.*

¹²⁸ Sophocles, *Antigone*, 569.

¹²⁹ C. Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious: A Study of the Transformations and Symbolism of the Libido, a Contribution to the History of Thought* (New York, NY: Moffat, Yard, and Company, 1916), 514, citing A. Dieterich, *Mutter Erde: Ein Versuch über Volksreligion* (Leipzig/Berlin: Teubner, 1905), 107.

THE MEANING OF THE MYSTERY

Plato explicitly described that what was experienced in the Mystery initiation was a face to face encounter with deity.¹³⁰ As a Neoplatonist, the Christian Paul described his own mystical rapture in the same terms.¹³¹ As enacted in all the scenarios for such Mysteries, the initiate experienced a symbolic death as a preparation for enhanced living. At Eleusis, the initiate, in the words of Cicero, “learned the beginnings of life and gained the power not only to live happily, but to die with better hope.”¹³² The entire evolution of civilized modes of culture and the analogous hybridizing of primitive toxic plants into the foodstuffs upon which life depends became a personal experience in the vast expanse of limitless time. Life henceforth was lived with confidence in its antecedents and its cosmic projection.

¹³⁰ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 250e *et seq.*

¹³¹ Paul, *I Corinthians*, 13.12; *2 Corinthians*, 12.2-5.

¹³² Cicero, *Laws*, 2.14.36.