

## Orpheus the Magician: The *Orphic Argonautica*

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**Abstract.** The modelling of identity involves the construction of opposites and “Others”, whose relevance is always subject to the continuous interpretation of their differences from “Us”. The mythological figure of Orpheus is a composite and multifaceted paradigm, charged with the model characteristics of Otherness both through literature and through the visual arts. Based on the analysis of the *Orphic Argonautica* and the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius, this article aims to concisely identify the concepts projected in the Thracian singer and musician’s functional mythological elements that construct this Otherness through unconventional behaviour and liminality.

**Key words:** Orpheus, The *Orphic Argonautica*, Others/Us, Otherness, Thracia

**The *Orphic Argonautica* (Ὀρφείως Ἀργοναυτικά) and the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius.** The motif of Orpheus as an Argonaut is developed in a particularly detailed, albeit very late variant, in the *Orphic Argonautica* (Ὀρφείως Ἀργοναυτικά), an epic poem of 1376 hexameter verses, dated no earlier than the 4th (West 1983, 37-38), 5th and even 6th centuries. It is an account from the first-person perspective of Orpheus (Fig. 1). Since the early Christian writer Tatianus (circa 120-173 AD; Tatian. *Ad Graecos*. 1.41; King 1867, 6-7) many have tended to ascribe the poem’s authorship to Onomacritus (circa 530-480 BC), who, according to Tatianus, had compiled all the works distributed under the name of Orpheus (Kinkel 1877, fr. 8, 241). This opinion is shared not only by a number of ancient authors but also by modern researchers. Some of them are more cautious, assuming that the poem’s authorship belongs to an unknown author, someone who was active no later than Onomacritus.



**Fig. 1.** Orpheus; a fragment of a black-figure vessel, the Acropolis of Athens, around 470 BC. National Museum, Athens ([https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Orpheus-470-BC-National-Museum-Athens-Source-Greek-Mythology-1986-Athens\\_fig4\\_245543088](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Orpheus-470-BC-National-Museum-Athens-Source-Greek-Mythology-1986-Athens_fig4_245543088))



**Fig. 2** A musician with a lyre; bronze, Geometric Period (around the 8th century BC). Herakleion Archeological Museum, Crete (<http://rolfgross.dreamhosters.com/The-Stones-of-Greece/2012StonesofGreeceEnglish/Crete/Crete.html>)

*Ode*, composed around 466/5 BC to celebrate the chariot victory at Delphi of Arkesilaus, King of the Hellenic colony of Cyrene in Africa. This poetic work is Pindar's longest narrative poem, which integrates a number of earlier versions from Homer (Homer. *Odys.* 12.69-72) onwards, which preceded it but were either completely lost or survived in scanty fragments. Orpheus with his golden lyre (Fig. 2) is mentioned among the Argonauts only once and Apollo is implied to be his father:

ἐξ Ἀπόλλωνος δὲ φορμιγκτὰς ἀοιδᾶν πατὴρ  
ἔμολεν, εὐαίμητος, Ὀρφεύς.

And from Apollo the lyre-player came, the father of songs, much-praised Orpheus.

(Pind. *Phyth.* 4.176-177)

A similar genealogy is presented in a fragment by Asklepiades, quoted in the scholion to Apollonius' *Argonautica* (Schol. Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.23). Thus, according to Asklepiades, Orpheus was a son of Apollo and Calliope (ἔστι δέ, ὡς Ἀσκληπιάδης, Ἀπόλλωνος καὶ Καλλιόπης). These references, however, are an exception rather than an enduring tradition. The prevailing versions relate the singer's origin to the alternative space of Thracia (see below) and downplay his origin.

The analysis of the verses and their structure, however, makes it possible to relate them to a much later period which does not precede at least that of Apollonius Rhodius (Bode 1825, 388-397). Writing in Late Antiquity, the author under the name of Orpheus had the opportunity to integrate or at least to know the entire tradition that preceded him, largely following the Hellenistic epic *Argonautica* written by Apollonius Rhodius in the 3rd century BC. But the *Orphic Argonautica* stands out not only in terms of many important details but also in terms of the simplicity of narrative and expression in comparison to Apollonius' epic poem.

**Orpheus as an Argonaut.** The earliest literary description of the Argonauts' campaign before Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* (3th c. BC) is found in Pindar's *Fourth Pythian*

The metope at Delphi, considered to be the earliest known representation of Orpheus and dated around the 7th century BC (Szeliga 1986, 297-305), also depicts him in the context of the Argonauts' campaign. This mythological motif seems to be the most ancient, literarily developed nucleus, in which the main strategies of the Thracian singer and musician's figure are projected.

One of the earliest poetic records - fragm. 62 by Simonides of Ceos (second half of the 6th - first half of the 5th centuries BC) - places Orpheus and his supernatural skills unambiguously in the context of the Argonauts' mysterious journey.

τοῦ καὶ ἀπειρέσιοι  
πωτῶντ' ὄρνιθες ὑπὲρ κεφαλᾶς,  
ἀνὰ δ' ἰχθύες ὀρθοὶ  
κυανέου ῥ' ὕδατος ἄλ-  
λοντο καλᾷ σὺν ἀοιδᾷ.

Above his head innumerable birds flitted, and fish leapt straight out of the dark blue water at his beautiful song...

(Simonides, fragment 62 (Living Poets, Simonides))

A similar motif appears in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* (1.572-574), when the son of the Thracian Oeagrus begins to play his well-composed song on his lyre and fishes start darting over the deep sea.

... τοὶ δὲ βαθείης  
ἰχθύες αἰσσοντες ὑπερῶν ἄλός, ἄμμιγα παύροις  
ἄπλετοι, ὕγρὰ κέλευθα διασκαίροντες ἔποντο.

... and the fishes came darting through the deep sea, great mixed with small, and followed gambolling along the watery paths (Seaton (ed. & trans.) 1912).

**Orpheus the Foreigner.** At the first level of analysis, it is undoubtedly the foreign (non-Hellenic) origin of Orpheus that stands out, which is a universal means of defining the collective identities on the basis of the fundamental ideas of similarity and difference with a focus on the reversal of cultural values. This circumstance places him in marked contrast with the normative image of the citizen-warrior of the polis, represented in vase paintings, reliefs and sculptures. His identification as a Thracian has multiplying strategies. On the one hand, this is the explicit socio-political positioning beyond the Hellenic (polis) world, i.e. the Hellenic *paideia* (παιδεία); on the other hand, this is the mythogeographic reference beyond the boundaries of the civilized, i.e. inhabited, world, which constructs both the basic liminality of the singer-musician and the unique perspective of a mystical journey to the Beyond, where he had acquired extraordinary knowledge. This is a specific means of constructing the figure that both crosses and unites the boundaries between what is native (Hellenic)

and what is foreign, what is civilized and what is wild, what is human and what is non-human, between the human world and the divine one, in such a way as to give it supernatural powers.

According to the *Orphic Argonautica*, when Jason set out to gather his crew of kings and heroes, he first sought out Orpheus in Pieria, on the highest peaks of Leibethra, while he played the guitar skillfully, singing sweet songs, stroking wild animals and winged serpents (vv. 71-73). The mytho-geographic reference to what is wild, uncivilized and outside the polis clearly defines the socio-political projections of the Thracian's mythological figure. While in Apollonius' *Argonautica* Orpheus is the ruler of Bistonian Pieria (1.23-34), in the *Orphic Argonautica* he is the ruler of the Cicones in cattle-rich Bistonia or, in more general terms, Thracia (1.77-80), somewhere in "the forest of Haemonius and the river Strymonius and the steep ravines of Rhodopa":

Ὀρφεῦ Καλλιόπης τε καὶ Οἰάγρου φίλε κοῦρε,  
Βιστονίη Κικόνεσσι πολυρρήνοισιν ἀνάσσω  
χαῖρ' ἐπεὶ Αἰμονίουσ' ὄχεάσ' πρώτιστον ἰκάνω,  
80 Στρυμονίουσ' τε ῥοάσ', Ῥοδόπης τ' αἰπεινὰ πρὸς ἄγκη.

Orpheus, beloved son of Calliope and Oeagrus, ruling the Cicones in cattle-rich Bistonia, I greet thee. I come now to the forest of Haemonius and the river Strymonius and the steep ravines of Rhodopa (*Trans.* Colavito 2011).

In his *Argonautica* (1.23), Apollonius Rhodius also puts Orpheus first (πρῶτά νυν Ὀρφεὺς μνησόμεθα) and in the so-called *Catalogue of Argonauts* he devotes much more attention to this character in comparison to the others - twelve full verses. Of the 54 Argonauts (excluding Jason), only 15 appear in more than five specific situations. Orpheus appears in 13 scenes, taking second place behind Heracles, who has 19 appearances (Busch 1993, 301, n. 1).

According to Apollonius (*Apoll. Rhod. Argon.* 1.23 ff.), Orpheus was a son of the muse Calliope and the Thracian king Oeagrus (the same is confirmed by Conon 45; Tzetzes, *Schol. Lycophron* 831; Hyginus, *Fab.* 14, etc.; as the son of Oeagrus see Plat. *Sym.* 179d, Diod. 4.25.2; Clem. Al. *Protr.* 7, p. 63 ed. Potter), born near the mountain tops of Pimpleia - the starting point of the Argonauts' expedition. In his compendium of mythology, the *Bibliotheca*, Apollodorus refers to the singer's genealogy twice, with the first passage (1.3.2) providing the double genealogy, i.e., Orpheus is a son of Calliope and Oeagrus but is also considered (nominally, i.e., Zeus is the father of all kings!) by some to be a son of Apollo, combined with the mythological motif of Orpheus' magical power to move stones and trees. In the second passage (1.9.16), his origin is only briefly touched upon in the context of the *Catalogue of Argonauts* as "Orpheus, the son of Oeagrus" (Ὀρφεὺς Οἰάγρου), and this is followed (1.9.25) by a reference to the song with which he restrained the Argonauts while sailing past the Sirens (Bernabé 2017, 113-125).

In the whole mytho-literary tradition of the Thracian singer, his genealogical characteristics are unstable and divergent, but Thracia's mytho-geographic space remains an enduring *topos* of his origin (Fol 2008). The aristocratic principle of identification through ancestry is displaced by the singer's ethnicization. The growing tendency in the iconography of vase painting from the 5th century BC onwards to depict Orpheus in Thracian clothing when surrounded by Thracians is clearly noticeable and in contrast with earlier depictions of the singer in Greek dress (Linthorpe 1941, 13; Guthrie 1952). Pausanias (10.30.6) emphasizes that by his day, Orpheus was most commonly depicted as Thracian. Orpheus' presence on the ship "Argo" is an alternative epic variant that seems extremely important compared to the standard concept of the epic poets' heroic figures (Christopoulos 1991, 205-222). Researchers point out the alterity of the figure of Orpheus, who alone among the Argonauts is a son of the mortal Oeagrus, while the rest of the heroes are sons of gods: Pindar in his *Fourth Pythian Ode* explicitly characterizes them as demigods (ἡμίθεοι: vv. 184, 211, cf. 12). If the Argonauts are an exemplification of the heroic, Orpheus is their antithesis, or rather an anti-hero whose only weapon is his lyre. This origin takes him out of and largely puts him in contrast with the heroic aristocratic model *καλὸς κάγαθός*.

**Orpheus the Magician.** The narrative introducing the mythological motif of the magical powers of Orpheus' song and music is extremely discreetly implied and highly fragmented. Visualization in the visual arts seems to precede the appearance of the theme in its literary interpretation. Yet, it is possible to reconstruct a concrete literary narrative that would verbalize and specify the relation of the visually represented plot to Orpheus and the natural world enchanted by his song and music.

Socrates in Plato's *Theatetus* (179e-189d) makes a distinction between Orpheus, Musaeus, Homer and Hesiod in terms of their poetic expression: Orpheus is represented alternatively as *citharoedus*, which means that he plays and sings at the same time. The otherness of his musical skills is expressed in the union between words and music, whose incantatory and magical effect has the supernatural power to command birds, fish and beasts, trees and stones, but also the gods...

The first unequivocal reference to the precedent of his gaining divine insight as a direct consequence of his journey to Hades is in the *Orphic Argonautica* (v. 42). Jason convinced the Thracian to join the Argonauts because he alone could show them the ways in the sea, i.e., as a spiritual guide, but also as a priest (Val. Flacc. *Arg.* 186-187) and magician (Jourdan 2008, 5-36). Through his supernatural/magical skills, Orpheus unites the structure-determining opposition harmony - chaos of the tension between constructive and destructive powers. What is more, the other heroes did not want to set off without him (OA 77-95). Not only that! Here the anonymous poet has introduced a clear allusion to a previous mystical journey to the world of the dead, from which the singer from "horse-breeding Thracia" was able to return with mystical knowledge

about the Beyond, thanks to which he established specific initiation rites as an alternative to the polis religion. Jason's choice to seek Orpheus first before all the other heroes is dictated by the fact that he alone among mortals ventured to the dark fog, down into the bowels of Hades, and he alone of all mortals found the way back (OA 90-95):

- 90 ...Οὐ γὰρ δὴ πλῶσαι πρὸς βάρβαρα φῦλα μέδονται  
νόσφι σέθεν· καὶ γὰρ ῥα ποτὶ ζόφον ἠερόεντα  
νεΐατον εἰς κευθμῶνα, λιτῆς εἰς πυθμένα γαίης,  
μοῦνον ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων πελάσαι καὶ νόστον ἀνευρεῖν·  
ᾧν ἔνεκεν ξυνήν τε δύην Μινύαισιν ἀρέσθαι  
95 καὶ κλέος ἀνθρώποισιν ἐπ' ἔσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι.

They will not undertake to sail to the barbarian peoples without you. And indeed, because you alone among men ventured to the dark fog, down into the bowels of Hades, and found the way back, I ask you to undertake this and make common cause with the Minyans (*Trans.* Colavito 2011).

Diodorus of Sicily mentions that Orpheus visited Egypt in ancient times and, witnessing the Egyptian funerary practices, he invented his account of Hades (Diod. I.92.3). The ancient Greek author specifies that Orpheus brought from Egypt most of his mystic ceremonies, the orgiastic rites that accompanied his wanderings and the fabulous account of his experiences in the Underworld (Diod. I.96.4). The journey to the Beyond is replaced by the demythologized journey to the land of wisdom, i.e., Egypt.

According to Herodorus of Heraclea Pontica (31 F, 43 J; cf. Schol. Apoll. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.31; FGrH 2 Müller Fr. 39, p. 38), who composed an *Argonautica* about 400 BC, and Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* (*Argon.* 1.33), none other than the wise centaur Chiron advised Jason to take Orpheus with him, because only the Thracian singer was able to ensure unhindered passage for the ship "Argo" past the Sirens - the embodiment of death (Apoll. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.891-919), marking the Transition to the Beyond. The sound of their murderous voices could only be drowned by the music of the lyre and the magical song of Orpheus (Apoll. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.905-909). The basic structure of the extant versions of the myth about the Argonauts' campaign contains regions charged with the features of Otherness and the Beyond, and marked by extraordinary monsters and figures that belong to a realm outside the human world (Krevans 2000, 69-84; Hunter 1989, 10-12; Karanika 2010, 391-410; Sistakou 2008, 311-340; Stephens 2008, 96-97, etc.). Only a liminal figure like that of the Thracian musician and magician could be well acquainted with the mystery of the Transition across the boundary between the world of the living and the world of the Beyond.

Chiron is a seer already in Pindar's poetry (Pind. *Pyth.* 9.59-65). The centaur's hybrid figure, which is marked by the deforming discourse of this "otherness", has clear marker functions at the boundary with the world of the Beyond (Lozanova-Stancheva 2021, 14-34). Not only is he gifted with divination

skills, but he also imparts them to his followers (Apoll. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.508-512). Herodorus unambiguously identifies Chiron as “μάντις”:

Ἡρόδοτος δύο εἶναι Ὀρφεῖς φησιν· ὧν τὸν ἕτερον συμπεπλευκέναι τοῖς Ἀργοναύταις. Ζητεῖται δὲ διὰ τί Ὀρφεὺς ἀσθενὴς ὧν συνέπλει τοῖς ἥρωσιν· ὅτι μάντις ὧν ὁ Χείρων ἔχρησε μὴ δύνασθαι τὰς Σειρήνας παρελθεῖν αὐτοὺς Ὀρφέως μὴ συμπλέοντος. Οὕτως Ἡρόδοτος.

(Schol. Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.23)

Herodorus says that there were two Orpheuses, of whom one sailed with the Argonauts. It is a matter of enquiry why Orpheus, who lacked strength, sailed with the heroes. Because Chiron, who had mantic powers, prophesied that, if Orpheus did not sail with them, they would not be able to sail past even the Sirens. So it is according to Herodorus.

Along with his magical ability to calm the waves, the forces of nature and the Sirens with his music (there are many references to the magical power of his singing and music during the Argonauts' campaign!), one of Orpheus' functions on the ship “Argo” is his role as a priest in the fulfilment of sacred rites for the participants in the campaign. The Thracian musician is the campaign's spiritual leader (Karanika 2010, 401); he is primarily connected with the sacred rites performed by the heroes, the communication with the divine and the restoration of order (Apoll. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.492-515; see Busch 1993, 305-318; Karanika 2010, 395 with lit.); he makes decisions about the place, the time and the essence of the rites the Argonauts must perform to ensure their perilous journey goes smoothly. These functions are particularly clearly reconstructible in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*. Highly important for the successful start of the Argonauts' expedition is the combination of a sacrifice (Apoll. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.402-449) and a ritual feast (Apoll. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.450-459), involving the integral and complex functions of Orpheus' music-song (Apoll. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.496-515), where the singer's priestly and magical figure is unequivocally presented as having a central and crucial role in overcoming moments of crisis and restoring ὁμόνοια. Quite remarkable, though laconic, is the episode where Orpheus initiates the Argonauts into the Samothracian mysteries on the island of Samothrace (Apoll. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.915-921), which is necessary for them not only to proceed safely on their journey, but also to ensure a safe return. This has an indirect reference to the essence of the mysteries through which one can attain the knowledge about the mystical Transition to the Beyond and the successful return to the world of the living. Diodorus of Sicily (4.43.1) adds that when the Argonauts were overtaken by a great storm and they all lost hope they would survive, Orpheus, who was the only one on the ship initiated into the Samothracian Gods' mysteries, offered up a prayer to the Samothracian Gods for the heroes' salvation.

The ritual nature of the Argonauts' journey is well outlined and emphasized, which makes the presence of the figure of Orpheus the priest-*mistagogos* and prophet (μάντις) extremely important for the safe journey far away to the east,

towards the palaces of Aeetes, the Sun's son. For encoded at the heart of the Argonauts' journey is the idea of a journey to the other world, beyond the world of mortals.

As early as the beginning of the 20th century, Van der Kolf (Van der Kolf 1923) proposed the hypothesis of the ritual nature of the Argonauts' journey to the Beyond on the basis of the analysis of Pindar's *Fourth Pythian Ode* (vv. 157-165). The hypothesis introduces the motif of the Argonauts' campaign to the country of Aeetes, the son of Helios. This motif, which is not found in earlier authors, is based on the prophetic dream of Pelias, the king of Iolcus. In his dream, Phrixos asked Pelias to go to Aeetes' palaces to retrieve his spirit and the Golden Fleece. In order to understand the dream's message, Pelias sent a messenger to ask the Delphian oracle if the quest was worth it and the answer he received was that he should immediately send a ship on the sacred mission. Due to his advanced age, Pelias asked Jason to perform the heroic feat for him. The analysis of this motif further allows researchers to associate the Argonauts' journey with a journey to the Beyond (Farnell 1930, I, 148; Fehr 1936, 85; Burton 1962, 160), in which the retrieval of the dead person's spirit has a basic meaning and the oracle only unlocks and sets in motion the long chain of events. But the journey, though seemingly reminiscent of Orpheus' catabasis into the realm of Hades to bring Eurydice out of the world of the dead, takes place on a horizontal level, far away to the east, in the country of (the son of) the Sun!

An enduring feature of the singer's supernatural skills is his magical power over the living world and even over inanimate nature, which stems from the mystical power of his songs and music. The mythologeme's earliest appearance is in Euripides' tragedies *Iphigenia in Aulis* (Eur. *IA* 1211-1214) and *The Bacchae* (Eur. *Bacch.* 561ff.; see Ap. Rhod., *Argon.* 1.26ff.; Diod. 4.25.2; Eratosthenes, *Cat.* 24; Conon 45; Hor. *Carm.* 1.12.7ff.; Seneca, *Herakles Oetaeus* 1036ff.; Seneca, *Herakles Furens* 572ff.). Orpheus was said to enchant stubborn rocks and flowing rivers in the mountains by the sound of his songs and music. And the same wild oak trees which he led from Pieria under the charm of his lyre were said to grow even now near Zone on the Thracian coast, arranged close together in rows (Apoll. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.26-31). In later authors such as Pomponius Mela (Pomp. Mela, 2.2.16-33) and Nicander (Nicander, *Ther.* 458-482), the scene is reduced to a profane pastoral situation, set in a seemingly real geographical landscape near the city of Zone on the Thracian coast, probably under the influence of Apollonius Rhodius (1.23-34):

- πρῶτά νυν Ὀρφῆος μνησώμεθα, τόν ρά ποτ' αὐτῆ  
Καλλιόπη Θρήκι φατίζεται εὐνηθείσα  
25 Οἰάγρῳ σκοπιῆς Πιμπληίδος ἄγχι τεκέσθαι  
αὐτὰρ τόνγ' ἐπέουσιν ἀπειρέας οὔρεσι πέτρας  
θέλξει ἀοιδῶν ἐνοπῆ ποταμῶν τε βέεθρα.  
φηγοὶ δ' ἀγριάδες, κείνης ἔτι σήματα μολπῆς,  
ἀκτῆς Θρηκίης Ζώνης ἐπι τηλεθόωσαι  
30 ἐξείης στιχόωσιν ἐπήτριμοι, ἄς ὄγ' ἐπιπρὸ  
θελγομένας φόρμιγγι κατήγαγε Περὶθηεν.

Ὀρφέα μὲν δὴ τοῖον ἑὼν ἐπαρωγὸν ἀέθλων  
Αἰσονίδης Χείρωνος ἐφημοσύνησι πιθήσας  
δέξατο, Πιερὴ Βιστωνίδι κοιρανέοντα.

First let us mention Orpheus, whom once Calliope herself is said to have given birth to in Thrace, after sleeping with Oeagrus near the Pimpleian peak. But they say that by the sound of his songs he bewitched stubborn rocks and flowing rivers in the mountains. And even now wild oaks, traces of his song, flourish on the Thracian headland at Zone, ranged in rows, closely packed. He led them straight down from Pieria, bewitched by his lyre playing. Such was Orpheus, lord of Bistonian Pieria, whom Aeson's son received as an ally in his trials, obeying the orders of Chiron.

(Living Poets, Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica* 1.23-34)

The word *magus* (μάγος) appeared in the ancient Hellenic language no earlier than the end of the 6th century BC as a loanword from Old Persian, usually associated with the notion of “priest”, i.e., with religious professionals well-versed in divination, the interpretation of dreams (Hdt. 1.107-8, 1.120, 7.19; Dinon *FGrH* 690 F 10 = Cicero, *Div.* 1.46) and omens (Hdt. 7.37); possessing knowledge of the divine (Hdt. 1.132, 7.43, 7.113; Xenophon, *Cyr.* 4.5.14, 7.5.57, 8.1.23, 8.3.11), but also indicating suspicious ritual activities of foreigners (Xanthus *FGrH* 765 F 31 = Clem. Al. *Strom.* 3.2.11.1; Sotion frg. 36 Wehrli = Diog. Laert. 1.7; Hdt. 1.140; Strab. 15.3.20; see Nock 1933, 164-189 = Nock 1972a, 308-324; Nock 1972b, 516-526; Bremmer 2008, 235-248; Kingsley 1995, 173-210). This would explain why in the Hellenic mytho-literary tradition, it is precisely the figure of Orpheus the Thracian that is charged with magical skills and supernatural power.

The first ancient Hellenic author who is reported to have mentioned the word *magus* (μάγος) is Heraclitus of Ephesus, whose account places the term, not coincidentally, in the context of the Orphic-Dionysian mysteries. Fragments of the account are preserved in Clement of Alexandria's *Protrepticus* (2.22.2) (the early 3rd century AD). As an answer to the question asking whom Heraclitus' prophecy refers to, Clement of Alexandria provides the following note:

**Heraclitus, DK 12 B 14** (Diels, Kranz 1952) = **Clem. Al. Protr. 22:**

τίσι δὴ μαντεύεται Ἡράκλειτος Ἐφέσιος; Νυκτιπόλοις, μάγοις, βάκχοις, λήναις, μύσταις· τούτοις ἀπειλεῖ τὰ μετὰ θάνατον, τούτοις μαντεύεται τὸ πῦρ· τὰ γὰρ νομιζόμενα κατ' ἀνθρώπους μυστήρια ἀνιερωστὶ μυθεῖται.

Against whom are Heraclitus the Ephesian's prophecies addressed? “The wanderers of the night: the magi, the bacchantes, the maenads, the initiates” - he threatens all these men with tortures after death, he threatens them with fire, for “what men believe to be mystery initiations are impious rites”.

In ancient times, magic was almost always associated with the religious practices of some Other, some foreigner. This is a view that differentiates these

practices from the norm, i.e., from one's own practices which constitute a religion, and becomes a means of defining Otherness and demarcating oneself from it. This is how the concept of magic developed from the name of the group of priests or magicians (μάγοι) and sorcerers/seers (γόητες) (Graf 1994, 20-28; Rives 2002, 270-90).

In Hellenic antiquity, the terms φάρμακα and ἐπωδαί were used to distinguish between two types of magic. The term φαρμακίς (with a secondary connotation of 'female magician' and cognate with the word φάρμακον) appeared no earlier than the 5th century BC, originally referring to a woman who handles herbs, medicines and plants used not only for healing but also for poisoning and magical activities. The term's semantic scope, however, gradually extended to include the chanting of spells (ἐπωδαί), the use of harm-causing means or the application of magical procedures (Bremmer 1999, 1-12; Collins 2001, 477-493).

We should not underestimate the fact that in this case we are faced with a metaphorical situation of contrasting Athenian women with foreigners. Because in the ancient authors' accounts, in classical Athens, the women practicing magic are never Athenian but always foreigners. Such women are Circe and Helen in Homer's *Odyssey*, Medea in her tragic interpretations, as well as the notorious Thessalian witches (γυνή φαρμακίς) in Aristophanes' comedy *Clouds* (v. 749), who were reputed to be able to bring the moon down or cause a solar eclipse. According to Diodorus of Sicily (4.45.2-4.45.5), Circe is Medea's sister and she is unsurpassed in her ability to extract poisons from herbs. It seems plausible to draw a close parallel with the court case in Athens against Theoris of Lemnos, who was accused of witchcraft (Collins 2001, 477-493) and sentenced to death for poisoning. By the way, the word for *magus* in the feminine gender did not appear before the Roman period! According to M. Schmidt (Schmidt 1995, 60), the absence of this specific social status was due to the lack of social space in the polis, where women, the polis citizens' wives or daughters, could perform magical rites, which is why magicians did not have a female equivalent not only in Athens, but also in the classical Hellenic world.

Medea is the typical exemplification of γυνή φαρμακίς (Apoll. Rhod. *Argon.*, 50-54) but she is also well versed in the mystery of ἐπωδαί. In Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, it is only thanks to her charms and magical herbs that Jason manages to steal the Golden Fleece. The princess enchants the dragon-guardian of the Golden Fleece by invoking the mistress of the Underworld; to lull the dragon to sleep, she sprinkles its eyes with a freshly cut branch of juniper dipped in a mystical potion, while chanting spells (ἐπωδαί). The episode is described rather concisely, given its decisive importance for the entire poem. It features only Colchian, the princess and Jason.

In his *Argonautica*, the author "Orpheus", who occupies the position of protagonist in the complex system of magical activities and incantations, describes a very different situation. Medea is more of a passive witness to what is happening. According to Diodorus, who follows Dionysius Scythobrachion, the Golden Fleece is kept in the temple of Ares (Diod. 4.47.1), which is surrounded by a great wall (Diod. 4.47.2 and 6). In Apollonius' *Argonautica*, the sacred grove is dedicated to Ares but it is simply a cluster of trees without a hint of enclosure. In the *Orphic Argonautica*, the sacred grove of Ares is hidden behind

“a fifty-four foot high enclosure, defended by towers and polished blocks of iron, crowned by seven defensive walls in a circle. Within it were three gigantic gates of bronze, between which ran a wall, and atop this, golden battlements. At one of the gateposts there stood [a statue of] the far-seeing queen, scattering with her motion the radiance of fire, whom the Colchians propitiate as Artemis of the gate, resounding with the chase, terrible for men to see, and terrible to hear, unless one approaches the sacred rites and purification, the rites kept hidden by the priestess who was initiated, Medea, unfortunate in marriage, along with the girls of Cyta. No mortal, whether native or stranger, entered that way, crossing over the threshold, for the terrible Goddess kept them away by all means, breathing madness into her fire-eyed dogs” (*Trans.* Colavito 2011).

“In the innermost recess of the enclosure was a sacred grove, shaded by green trees. Therein were many laurels, cornels, tall shoots, and grass, within which grew short plants with powerful roots [associated with the dead and used in the art of magic - author’s note]: asphodel [the unfading flower of Paradise, associated with mourning and death, facilitating the transition of the dead to Elysium - author’s note], beautiful maidenhair, rushes, galingale, delicate verbena, sage, hedge-mustard, purple honeysuckle, healing cassidony, flourishing field basil, mandrake, hylwort; in addition fluffy dittany, fragrant saffron, nose-smart; and also lion-foot, greenbrier, camomile, black poppy, alcuia, all-heal, white hellebore, aconite, and other noxious plants which are born from the earth. In the middle, the trunk of a great oak reached high, and the tree’s branches overspread the grove. On this, spread over a long branch, hung the Golden Fleece, over which a terrible snake continuously watched, a serpent dangerous to men and indescribable. It was covered in golden scales and wound about the tree trunk with its huge coils, watching over the tomb of Zeus Chamaizelos [“earth-bound” or chthonic Zeus - author’s note] while guarding the Fleece. Untiring, exempt from sleep, it kept guard over its charges, casting its gray eyes all about” (*Trans.* Colavito 2011). Many researchers associate the tomb with the entrance to the Underworld.

Mopsus, who knew all these things through his prophetic art, urged the other Argonauts to beg Orpheus to propitiate Hecate and the terrible sleepless monster. Then the citharode ordered that he be accompanied to the place by Castor, Polydeuces and Mopsus, besides Jason and, of course, Medea. And there follows, as if taken out from the recipes in the Magical Papyri, a remarkable episode of magical operations and the invocation of the terrible goddess, by which the impregnable gates of the enclosure were opened and the sacred grove appeared before the Argonauts’ eyes. Then Orpheus, dressed in a black mantle, matched his divine voice with his tortoise-shell lyre, resounding deeply, plucking its lowest-pitched string and invoked the god of sleep to put the ever-watchful dragon to sleep. And he instantly obeyed him. Medea was astounded by all this! She urged Jason to take the Fleece and they quickly reached the ship... In her homeland, the princess cannot be an exemplification of Otherness, necessary for her to perform the magical operations by which she could overcome her goddess’s power and the obstacles along the way to the Golden Fleece. She needs the Foreigner, whose universal emanation is the figure of Orpheus.

## Conclusion

In the combined accounts of the *Orphic Argonautica* and Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, Orpheus emerges as one of the earliest, or perhaps the earliest mythological figure, charged with the supernatural power to manipulate the natural and the divine worlds through a combination of actions and words that have miraculous properties; or a skill in creating desired effects and controlling events by means of magical operations, rites and ceremonies, thus influencing the natural and supernatural forces (Lozanova-Stancheva 2020, 14-35). But if Medea, the figure of the female foreigner, also associated with magical activities and skills, brings chaos and destructiveness outside her homeland, the figure of Orpheus is associated with rituality that identifies him as a mediator between the human and the divine spheres, a figure that restores ὁμόνοια and harmonizes differences.

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## Abbreviations

- Apoll. Rhod. *Argon.*:** Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*  
**Cicero, *Div.*:** Cicero, *De divinatione*  
**Clem. Al. *Protr.*:** Clemens Alexandrinus, *Protrepticus*  
**Clem. Al. *Strom.*:** Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata*  
**Conon:** Conon, *Diegeseis*  
**Diod.** Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica*  
**Diog. Laert.** Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum*  
**Eratosthenes, *Cat.*:** Eratosthenes, *Catasterismi*  
**Eur. *IA*:** Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*  
**Eur. *Bacch.*:** Euripides, *Bacchae*  
**FGrH:** Fragmenta historicorum Graecorum  
**Homer. *Odys.*:** Homerus, *Odyssea*  
**Hor. *Carm.*:** Horatius, *Carmina*  
**Hdt.:** Herodotus, *Historiae*  
**Hyginus, *Fab.*:** Hyginus, *Fabulae*  
**OA:** *Orphei Argonautica*  
**Pind. *Phyth.*:** Pindarus, *Phythiae*  
**Plat. *Sym.*:** Plato, *Symposium*  
**Pomp. Mela:** Pomponius Mela, *De situ orbis*  
**Schol. Ap. Rhod. *Argon.*:** Scholia in Apollonium Rhodium, *Argonautica*  
**Strab.:** Strabo, *Geographica*  
**Tatian. *Ad Graecos*:** Tatianus Syriacus, *Oratio ad Graecos*  
**Tzetzes, *Schol. Lycophron*:** Tzetzes, *Scholia in Lycophron*  
**Val. Flacc. *Arg.*:** Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica*  
**Xenophon, *Cyr.*:** Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*

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