

MUSHROOMS AND PHILOSOPHERS*

CARL A. P. RUCK

Department of Classical Studies, Boston University, 745 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215 (U.S.A.)

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Summary

The fifth-century philosopher Socrates was satirized by his contemporary, the comic poet Aristophanes, in the *Birds* as conducting a rite of necromancy in the company of a group of people called the "Shade-foots", a fabulous tribe from India who were thought to jump about on a single foot that could also be used as a parasol. The historical reference for this imagined scene of necromancy is the scandal that had recently occurred in which it was discovered that many prominent Athenians, including a notorious disciple of Socrates, were guilty of profanely celebrating a secret religious rite with friends in their private homes. This rite was the so-called Eleusinian Mystery, the major religion of the pre-Christian era, and it involved a shamanic ceremony in which initiates, who were sworn to secrecy, drank a special potion and experienced a vision of spirits from the world of the dead. The scandal had uncovered that some people were apparently using the sacred drug for their own entertainment.

The Eleusinian Mystery was a Hellenized version of a primordial Indo-European shamanic religion that was carried into Greece and combined with indigenous agrarian traditions when the Indo-Europeans migrated into the Mediterranean lands in the second millennium before Christ. A similar migration brought them and their religion into Iran and India at about the same time. There the religion survived as the ancient Soma cult, which originally also involved shamanic experience induced by the drinking of a sacred drug. R. Gordon Wasson has shown that this drug was a fungal extract and that a similar role was reserved for the fungi in the traditions of the Eleusinian Mystery, both apparently survivals from the primordial religion.

The Aristophanic parody of Socrates' supposed rite of necromancy confirms that a fungal drug was indeed used in the Eleusinian Mystery, for the creatures with single, parasol-like feet can be related to a very ancient epithet for Soma and they survive in contemporary Asiatic shamanism and in European folk traditions about mushrooms. Furthermore, the Greek

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myth about the theft of fire, which is also part of the context for the Aristophanic parody, can be shown to have reference to shamanic experience, with parallels in Indo-Iranian traditions. Thus, in accusing Socrates of profaning the Mystery, Aristophanes was suggesting that the philosopher had derived his theories from drug-induced visions. Such was, in fact, the common pre-supposition about Socrates and other ancient philosophers.

Toward the end of Aristophanes' comedy, the *Birds*, Prometheus, the mythical figure who stole fire from the gods, arrives on stage, shielding himself from the view of his arch-enemy Zeus, the god directly overhead in the heavens, by hiding himself beneath the shade of a parasol. This episode of the comedy is completed by a dance in which the chorus of birds describes the philosopher Socrates in a swamp, where he is summoning up spirits from the dead in the company of a strange race of people called the "Shade-foots".

Amidst the Shade-foots, there is a certain swamp where Socrates, unwashed, summons up souls. Amongst his clients came Peisander, who begged to see a spirit that had forsaken him while he remained alive. He had a camel-lamb as victim for sacrifice, and, like Odysseus of old, he slit its throat, whereupon to him from the depths there came up toward the camel's trench a spirit, Chaerephon, the "bat".

(lines 1553 - 1564)

Who were these Shade-foots amongst whom the famous Greek philosopher is supposed to be performing this rite of necromancy? They can be found still attending such rites in modern times and hence their identity may give us a key for understanding what Socrates was really doing.

I. Shade-foots

The Shade-foots were said to be a grotesque tribe of people who had only a single leg with a broad webbed foot like that of geese. They customarily lay on their backs, protecting themselves from the heat of the sun by resting in the shade cast by their single, up-raised, parasol-like feet. At other times, however, they displayed extraordinary vigor, leaping up and down with prodigious strength on their solitary legs. We first hear of them in the sixth century B.C. from a traveler named Scylax, who, according to Herodotus (4.44), wrote a description of a trip down the Indus and thence along the coast to Suez in the reign of the Persian king, Darius I. Nothing remains of Scylax's book, but a fragment of another work from the end of the next century is still extant, in which they and their bizarre characteristics are again mentioned. This is a book by Ctesias (60 Jacoby), a Greek physician from Cnidos who served at the Persian court and wrote an account of a similar voyage. Both of these early travelers claimed that India was the homeland of the Shade-foots.¹

The tribe was called by other names as well. They appear to have been the same people that we hear of even earlier from the seventh-century poet Alcman, who knew them as "Cover-foots" (148 Page). Another name, although Greek, is preserved only in Latin sources. The Shade-foots were also known as Monocoli or "One-legs" (Pliny, *Natural History* 7. 2. 23; Aulus Gellius 9. 4. 9).

This latter name is particularly interesting because when we find these people in modern times, they will be a particular plant involved in Asiatic shamanism. Monocoli in Greek was an epithet of plants (Theophrastus, *How Plants Grow* 2. 25, *Enquiry into Plants* 9. 18. 8). In modern times, the prodigious strength of their single leg will also be remembered from ancient traditions.

II. The scene of necromancy

Before tracking them down today, however, we should look at the other details of the scene described by Aristophanes. Two other historical figures are also said to be present, Peisander and Chaerephon. The choice of these two is the point of the joke.

Chaerephon was the frequent and usually over-enthusiastic companion of Socrates. It was his impetuous consultation of the Delphic oracle that had elicited the famous response that Socrates was wiser than other men, an enigmatic reply that led to Socrates' life-long quest for someone wiser than himself, only at last to conclude that the oracle must have meant that all men are stupid, but that he alone knew it and thus, by that little bit, was wiser. We know of Chaerephon not only from the Platonic dialogues, but also from parodies of him in other comedies. He was an excitable and frenzied person (Plato, *Apology* 21 a, *Charmides* 153 b), a pederast (Aristophanes 377 Hall and Geldart) who could be called a "child of Night" (Aristophanes 573), both characteristics that would make appropriate his metamorphosis into a bat as he impersonates the spirit that Socrates summons in the necromantic rite. He was also a pale person of notoriously slight and weak build, as dry and fragile as a moth's crysalis (Aristophanes 377; Anonymous 26 Edmonds), someone whom Aristophanes had described already as "half-dead" years ago in his parody of Socrates' teaching in the *Clouds* (504).

It is this physical frailty that Aristophanes refers to as the culmination of the scene in the swamp, for Peisander, who was satirized as a coward in another comedy produced at this same festival of drama (Phrynichus, *Monotropos* fr. 20 Edmonds; cf. hypothesis for Aristophanes' *Birds*), apparently because of some otherwise unknown action in battle (Eupolis, *Exempt from Service* or *The Women Men* fr. 31 Edmonds), has come to Socrates' rite of necromancy in order to attempt to regain his own spirit that had failed him through cowardice. Instead of a miraculous return to bravery, however, he succeeds only in getting the squeaking bat-like weakling, Chaerephon.

III. Peisander and the affair of the profanations

More important than the joke for our purposes, however, is the veiled accusation that Aristophanes is making against Socrates by describing this imagined scene of necromancy. To understand this we must know something more about Peisander and about what was going on in Athens at this time. The *Birds* was produced at the City Dionysia in March of 414 B.C. Athens was engaged in fighting a great and lengthy war with Sparta and its allies, and just the previous year had sent its armada against the Sicilian city of Syracuse. Just prior to the sailing of the fleet on that expedition, an event had occurred that had thrown the city into confusion. It was discovered that some group of people had gone through the city, knocking off the phalluses on the stone representations of the god Hermes, the so-called herms, that were commonly placed before public and private buildings as magical guardian figures. This mutilation of the herms was not only an act of sacrilege, but it seemed to indicate that some political group had bound its members to secrecy through mutual complicity in the crime in order to prepare the way for an attempt to overthrow the democratic government. Peisander² was a leader in the official investigation into the whole affair, and it was he on the board of inquiry who had interpreted the crime of vandalism as just such an act of conspiracy (Andocides, *On the Mysteries* 36). The investigation, moreover, was broadened to include other instances of sacrilege, and it came to light that a number of prominent citizens had been illegally performing the initiation ceremony for the Eleusinian Mystery in their private homes with dinner guests. Amongst those implicated was Socrates' famous disciple, Alcibiades, who was accordingly recalled from his generalship on the Sicilian expedition, whereupon he fled into exile in Sparta, the city that headed the coalition of states opposed to Athens and its empire in the war. He was condemned *in absentia* and his property was confiscated and sold at public auction.

Prior to this scandal, Alcibiades had been one of the most promising younger leaders of the democracy, but his flight to Sparta revealed that his demagoguery had masked his underlying sympathies for his own aristocratic class. He supported the populace merely to advance his own career. Apparently Aristophanes thought the same was true of Peisander, for a few years later, he was to emerge as a leader of the oligarchic faction that attempted to arrange for the restoration of Alcibiades. Peisander was to be prominent amongst the so-called group of Four Hundred oligarchs who seized control of the city in an attempt to come to terms with Sparta, and he too was to flee to the enemy at the frontier fortress of Decelea when the regime fell in September of 411 (Thucydides 8. 49, 8. 98. 1), whereupon his property was confiscated (Lysias 7. 4) and he is not heard of again. During his few months as one of the Four Hundred, Peisander arrested a fellow aristocrat, the orator Andocides, who originally had secured immunity in the earlier investigation into the mutilation of the herms and the profanation of the Mysteries by turning state's evidence and naming many of his associates

(Andocides, *On his Return* 14). Although this informer was himself secure from prosecution at the time, a decree aimed specifically at him had later been passed, prohibiting anyone who had confessed to impiety from taking part in religious or commercial activities in the city, and he had accordingly been forced to withdraw into exile. While away from Athens, the informer had amassed a fortune as a merchant and had attempted to buy the good favor of what he thought was the rising political faction by an act of largesse to the fleet at Samos, only to find himself on the wrong side when he returned to an Athens controlled by the new group of Four Hundred oligarchs. Andocides' arrest and maltreatment by Peisander testifies to the degree of enmity that these wealthy citizens three years after the affair of the mutilation of the herms continued to direct toward someone who had caused themselves and their families so much trouble by his revelations and betrayal. Certainly Peisander, the former chief prosecutor in the investigation of the mutilations, would seem to have been acting out of character in supporting the guilty Alcibiades' restoration and, at the same time, persecuting the former star witness, unless, as is probable, the investigation into the mutilations had gotten out of hand by being linked to sacrileges in general, a broadening that went beyond the immediate problem of the suspected conspiracy and netted many who simply were discovered, like Alcibiades, to have been treating the forbidden Mystery ceremony as a private social event for the entertainment of their dinner guests.

As far as the comedian Aristophanes was concerned, Peisander was a hypocrite, both in persecuting the profaners and again at this very time that he was involved in making preparations for the transfer of the city to the oligarchic faction in 411 in order to facilitate the return of Alcibiades. As Aristophanes says in his *Lysistrata*, which was produced at this time, Peisander's changeable policy indicated that his demagoguery was for sale (489), an accusation he had first made fifteen years earlier in one of his first comedies, the *Babylonians* (81 Hall and Geldart). Moreover, again it appears that the Mystery profanations and political conspiracy are linked, for Peisander and his oligarchic associates are accused of performing the forbidden ceremony. The Eleusinian Mystery involved the drinking of a special drink, the so-called *kykeon* or "mixed potion", and that is precisely what the hypocritical former prosecutor is accused of doing with Alcibiades and his aristocratic cronies, for, as Aristophanes claims, the whole politics of the city has become a "mix-up" because these plotters are again "mixing up" some "up-set" for the stomach, an accusation that puns by these words upon the Eleusinian "mixed" potion (489 - 491).

IV. The swamp of Dionysus

What Peisander was suspected of doing in 411 is merely a continuation of his earlier misdeeds in consulting the notorious Alcibiades' teacher Socrates at the necromantic seance in the swamp with the Shade-foots, for a number

of considerations will lead us to conclude that the Shade-foot parody with which we began can only be a reference to the cowardly demagogue's suspected complicity in the very scandal that he found himself hypocritically investigating. The swamp, first of all, is a clear indication of what Socrates actually is said to have been doing. The place is not in some remote exotic land, for it is but one in a series of similar parodies in this section of the *Birds*, and like the others, it can be located nowhere else but in Athens itself. It can be none other than the one swamp in Athens of which we have knowledge, the sacred Swamp near the base of the Acropolis, the so-called Swamp of Dionysus. It was precisely there that one could expect to summon up spirits, as, in fact, another comedian, the poet Eupolis, appears to have done in a play produced about this same time, the *Demes*, which involved the resurrection of the departed localities or parishes of an earlier Athens (cf. Edmond's reconstruction, fr. 90 - 135). This Swamp was the Athenian entrance to Hades, for such noisome places suggested to the folk imagination the putrefaction that lay beyond the grave. The god Dionysus himself was shown in a later comedy of Aristophanes, the *Frogs*, rowing across this very place to get to the other world, where he is met by a chorus of initiates from the Eleusinian Mysteries. One might well expect to find them there, for this Swamp was also the scene for a secret annual event that apparently was part of the Eleusinian rituals. There was a temple in this Swamp of Dionysus that was opened just twenty-four hours each year, from the evening of the second day of the Anthesteria Festival until the evening of the third and final day, at which time the spirits of the city's dear departed, who had returned to visit their families, were lovingly re-escorted back to their proper abode in the other world. These spirits had wandered abroad through the city for the three days of the festival, resurrected to celebrate a drunken revel with the living, who had summoned them at the start of the feast by drinking the intoxicating spirit of the new wine that had at last completed its subterranean fermentation. There was just one event that occurred in this temple in the Swamp of Dionysus during the Anthesteria. The so-called Queen of Athens, who was the wife of the king archon or inheritor of the sacral functions of kingship that went back to more ancient times before the secularization of the Athenian government, was prepared in this temple for her ritual union with the god Dionysus in an annual reenactment of the primal sacred marriage that magically reassured the yearly refounding of the city and reaffirmation of its fertile accord with the sources of life stemming from the other world (pseudo-Demosthenes 59. 117).

This sacred marriage had some relation to the so-called Lesser Eleusinian Mystery³, a ceremony that was a preliminary to the Greater Mystery that would be performed in the autumn of the year at the neighboring village of Eleusis. Socrates' rite of necromancy, therefore, in this Swamp with a person like Peisander and at this particular date would seem somehow involved in the great scandal of the day, the profanation of the Mysteries.

V. Tongue-in bellies and Revealers

Before proceeding in our investigation into what Socrates actually is supposed to have been doing, let us gain further assurance that, whatever it was, it was a profanation of the Mysteries. The Swamp parody is part of a choreographed two-part structure in the *Birds*, for which the second part is another parody involving fabulous peoples. This time the scene is a court of law conducted by “Tongue-in-bellies” amidst a people called “Revealers”:

Amongst the Revealers by the Hidden Water is a naughty race of Tongue-in-bellies, who harvest and sow, gather fruit with their tongues and pick figs. Babbling like foreigners is this race, students of Gorgias and Philippos — and because of them, these Tongue-in-bellies, these Philipposes, everywhere in Attica the tongue is a sacrificial victim cut apart. (lines 1694 - 1705)

In this parody, lawyers or orators are accused of aping their teachers in the quibbling play of words that make no sense in arguments proving the worse cause the better, as Aristophanes in the *Clouds* had said of Socrates, whom he considered chief amongst such teachers. There can be no doubt that this parody is meant as a companion piece for the Shade-foot verses, for structurally it would be expected since it is danced to the same choreographed rhythms and melody. Beyond that, however, it has a clear respiration in themes, with the Swamp matched by the Hidden Water and the sacrificed camel-lamb by the tongue, as well, of course, as with the matching fabulous peoples.

Here too the subject is the Mystery profanations, the great court event of the time. The Tongue-in-belly orators are hypocrites like Peisander, the prosecutor, for the fruit that their sowing and harvesting yields is bribe money, for “picking figs” indicates people who give evidence in court against others for bounty, the so-called sycophants or “fig-revealers”. The Tongue-in-bellies are themselves guilty of the case they try, for the lawyers are transformed into creatures with tongues in their greedy bellies, like the mysterious dwarfish woman who was supposed to have first served the Eleusinian potion to the goddess Demeter, and the Revealers amongst whom this trial takes place implicate the accusers in the crime they prosecute, since the official charge against the guilty was that they had “revealed” the Mystery. The Hidden Water or *klepshydra* also has a double meaning, for it puns upon the “water-stealer” or water clock that was used for timing speeches in the court and upon the so-named fountain near the cave beneath the Acropolis where the “Queen” Creussa conceived and bore her son Ion while gathering flowers, an event that Euripides presents in his *Ion* tragedy as a mythical version of the sacred marriage⁴. A further pun on the Revealers or *Phanai* also suggests Eleusinian connotations, for the “revealers” are verbally indistinguishable from the “torch processions” (cf. Euripides, *Rhesus* 943), such as those that took place in the cults of Dionysus; Aristophanes in the *Frogs* has Dionysus greeted by just such a torch procession of Eleusinian initiates in the Swamp when he arrives there in the other-world (340 ff.). Even the sacrificed tongue has similar connotations, for the orators’

butchering of speech recalls the prohibition of secrecy imposed upon the central events of the Eleusinian initiation.

VI. Socrates as profaner of the Mysteries

Actually, now that we recognize the Shade-foot parody and the corresponding parody of Revealers and Tongue-in-bellies as a reference to the contemporary scandal of the Mystery profanations, we might have expected that Socrates' rite of necromancy at this particular time could have been nothing else. The main political implication of the affair of the herms and the profanations was the anticipated pro-Spartan coup d'état, and it is not surprising that Socrates would have fallen under suspicion in the common mind. He was always associated with pro-Spartan sympathies and just the kind of aristocratic patrons and friends who might have been implicated in such a political coup⁵. These suspicions must have particularly centered upon him now that his disciple Alcibiades had not only been convicted of sacrilege, but was actually now living with the enemy in Sparta. It was commonly thought, moreover, that Socrates' involvement with Alcibiades was pederastic on the Laconian model (cf. Plato, *Symposium* 215 a ff.). It is, in fact, precisely as a phillaeonian that Socrates is labeled in the scene of necromancy in the *Swamp*, for he is given the epithet of "unwashed", a characteristic of those young friends and disciples of his who earlier in the comedy had been said to ape him or "Socratize" in a pro-Spartan mania, imitating his long hair and the hunger and filth that marked the rigorous indoctrination of young Spartans into their homoerotic warrior society (1281 - 1282). Already in the *Clouds*, Aristophanes had portrayed the filth of Socrates' disciples, a parody that supposedly was the beginning of the prejudice that would culminate two decades later in his own trial and execution for the crime of impiety in 399 B.C. (Plato, *Apology* 18 b).

Not only were Socrates and his friends notorious Spartan sympathizers, but even before the great scandal of the profanations, he was suspected of profaning the Mysteries. In the *Clouds*, he had been shown teaching his students to disdain conventional theology in a parody of a mystery initiation, as they probed the lower world for the bulbous plants that in the Eleusinian myth were associated with Persephone's abduction to Hades (188 ff.). He had, in fact, even been labeled a Melian in that comedy (830), on the model either of Diagoras of Melos or Aristagoras of that same island, both of whom had profaned the Mysteries on some occasion before the great scandal of 415 (scholia to *Clouds* 830 and *Birds* 1072). If one could accuse Socrates of profaning the Mysteries in 422, the date of the *Clouds*, certainly the proven guilt of Alcibiades seven years later would have implicated his unconventional and pro-Spartan teacher as well, and, in fact, the infamy of Diagoras is recalled in the *Birds* when the chorus of birds cites the reward that had been posted for the capture and death of that earlier profaner of the Lesser Mystery (1072 - 1073). It would have been inevitable, in any case, that

suspicion would fall upon Socrates since it was apparently well known that he was subject to mystical trances that were so similar to the experience of the Eleusinian vision that Plato adapts the language of the Mystery to describe them (Plato, *Symposium* 174 d ff., 220 b ff., *Phaedrus* 250 c).

VII. Mushrooms

To return, then, to our original question about what Socrates was really doing in the Swamp, it would appear that he was profaning the Mysteries. The scene of necromancy, therefore, is vital evidence about what was involved in the Eleusinian Mysteries, and evidence that hitherto has not been detected⁶. It remains to see whether the identity of the Shade-foots will allow us to be more precise about what happened at the Mysteries and about what Socrates is accused of doing in the company of that fabulous tribe of one-legged people from India.

I should like to show that the Shade-foot parody confirms a suggestion I made about the nature of the Eleusinian Mysteries in *The Road to Eleusis*⁷. In that book, I and my colleagues interpreted the Eleusinian Mysteries as communal shamanic ceremonies involving the ingestion of drugs. The Shade-foots will confirm what we suspected to have been the drug involved at the Lesser Mystery.

It is appropriate first to give some background about the studies from which our theory evolved. The collaboration was organized by R. Gordon Wasson, an amateur mycologist, who brought me together with the Swiss chemist, Dr. Albert Hofmann, to investigate the subject of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

In 1968, Wasson first proposed the cautious supposition that nothing in the *R̥gVeda*, a collection of religious hymns assembled in definitive form about 1000 B.C. or a little later, after a previous long tradition of oral transmission, was inconsistent with the idea that the plant and god Soma and his reputedly inebriating drink, the focus of a very ancient ritual, were to be identified as being originally a particular species of psychotropic mushroom or "entheogen"⁸, *Amanita muscaria* or, as it has sometimes been called in English, the "fly-agaric", a mushroom that has been employed until lately both in shamanic rites and as an inebriant in the forest belt of Siberia⁹. Since the initial publication of that hypothesis, Wasson's theory has received significant acceptance and corroboration¹⁰.

Various surrogates, usually not psychoactive, replaced the original inebriant in the later performances of the ancient ritual, perhaps because the true Soma was no longer easily obtainable in the lands to which the Indo-Iranian peoples migrated and had perhaps even been forgotten with the passage of time. These substitutes perpetuated certain symbolic or physical attributes of the original as remembered in the ancient poetic phrases that went back to a time before the poems were recorded in writing. It has recently been shown that the earliest surrogate for Soma in India was fungoid, hence adding strong confirmation for Wasson's theory¹¹.

This emergence of the lowly and often despised mushroom at the center of one of the major ancient religions validates what Wasson and his wife Valentina Pavlovna had first surmised during the years they spent together investigating the rich European folklore about fungi, for the widely dichotomous attitudes of the Indo-European peoples today seemed to suggest derivation from a still living and powerful taboo protecting the usage of a sacred plant¹². It was just such a religious usage that Wasson was to discover and elaborately document amongst Amerindian shamans in his study of the Mazatec María Sabina¹³.

If, however, the Soma theory were justified, one should also expect to detect analogues to the shamanic rite amongst other Indo-European peoples. Recently, Wasson has discovered an Ojibway shaman and herbalist, Kee-waydinoquay, who belongs to one of the tribes of the Algonkian Nation and who has confided to him her people's traditions about the ritual usage of *Amanita muscaria*¹⁴. The likelihood of continuity with the Siberian rites presents itself forcibly, and doubly so now that the language of the Wintun tribe of California seems to have a close genetic relationship to the Ob-Ugrian languages of north-western Siberia¹⁵.

Could the rite be detected not only in the ancient Aryan traditions, but also, as Wasson suspected, amongst the classical cultures of Greece and Rome? It was this question that Wasson proposed to me at the beginning of our collaboration on the ancient mystery religions, which he had long suspected of centering upon drug-induced visions¹⁶. There could be no doubt that the drinking of a specific potion was part of the ceremony at Eleusis, where the culmination of the Mystery was consistently described as an overwhelming vision of spiritual presences demonstrating the relationship of the living to the dead¹⁷. Drinking or drunkenness, moreover, seems to have been an element in the other, less known mysteries, such as those of the Kabeiroi at Thebes or the one celebrated at Samothrace. That the Eleusinian ceremony had been illegally performed for the enjoyment of dinner guests in private homes toward the end of the fifth century, moreover, suggested obvious parallels to the profane use of entheogens in modern times.

The ingredients of the Eleusinian potion are given as water, mint, and barley in the Homeric hymn to Demeter, our earliest literary source about the Mystery. Since the mint or *blechon* (*Mentha pulegium*) is hardly (or not at all) psychoactive¹⁸, our attention was directed to the barley. Here our third collaborator, Dr. Albert Hofmann, the discoverer of LSD, was able to supply us with the information that ergot or "rust", a common fungal parasite on grain, contains a powerful water-soluble drug. Ergot, moreover, like other higher fungi, produces fruiting bodies of the characteristic mushroom shape. Did ergot figure in Greek botanic traditions in a way that might suggest its involvement in the Eleusinian Mystery?

The Greeks believed, as is to some extent actually true, that edible plants were evolved forms of more primitive, wild, and in some cases actually inedible avatars, and that agriculture, as opposed to the mere gathering of

plants, was a triumph of civilization or culture. In particular, *aira* or *Lolium temulentum*, commonly called "darnel", "cockle", or "tares" in English, an inedible grass that grows as a weed in fields of grain and is usually (like grain itself) infested with ergot, seems to have been thought to be a primitive form of barley, which would revert to the weedy growth if not properly tended. A similar opposition between gathered and cultivated plants involved the god Dionysus: poisonous and intoxicating wild ivy with its diminutive clusters of berries was apparently related to a cultivated plant that it resembled, the vine with its bunches of juicy grapes. This opposition is often depicted in vase paintings, where the elder Dionysus is shown confronting the younger manifestation of himself in a new generation as his own son, the boy named "Bunch of Grapes", who carries the vine plant, while his father holds the wild ivy¹⁹. It is clear, moreover, that the winter-time mountain ceremonies of the maenads, the ecstatic female devotees of the god, involved the gathering of wild botanic versions of Dionysus, for their common implement, as shown in art and literature, was the so-called *thyrsos*, a hollow stalk stuffed with ivy leaves, a procedure that was the custom for preserving the freshness of herbs as they were gathered²⁰. The fact that maenadic ceremonies did not occur in any relationship to the timing of the events involved in viticulture can now be understood, for these mountain rites centered not upon wine but upon the wild and intoxicating herbs gathered while the more civilized god was absent in the other-world, undergoing the cultivation that would convert the juice of crushed grapes into an inebriant. Even wine, however, was felt to have an affinity to the toxins of wild plants, for, as we have shown, wine itself was flavored with various herbs that intensified its intoxicating qualities, hence requiring that it be diluted with several parts of water to tame it for civilized purposes.

In this opposition between wild and cultivated plants, the fungi played an important role, for they are seedless growths that defy cultivation and are thus paradigmatic of wildness. (The spores of mushrooms require a microscope to be seen distinctly.) Characteristic of all plants, of course, is the way they feed upon dead and putrefying matter. Here too the fungi had a special importance, for the tomb and the whole underworld were thought to be covered with mouldering growths that consumed the flesh of mortality. But even these wildest of plants could be made to function in the evolutionary botanical scheme. The Greeks realized that fermentation was a fungal process. The making of wine involved procedures and symbolism that suggested the tending of the dead and the hope for resurrection, for the blood of the harvested grape was entrusted, like any corpse, to subterranean, tomb-like containers, where the surrounding earth maintained the proper temperature for fermentation; when the process was completed, the containers were opened to release the new god, who returned together with the other spirits from the grave to celebrate a drunken revel on his birthday.

The goat also was symbolic of the more primitive god, and in the form of ithyphallic goat men, the so-called satyrs, he would lasciviously cavort and possess his ecstatic brides in the winter ceremonies on the mountains. The

goat's grazing habits, however, were a danger to the cultivated vine, and the hircine representative of the god became his special surrogate, whose sacrifice was necessary to assure the continuance of more civilized manifestations of Dionysus. Amongst the religious observances of Dionysus were the great festivals of drama, where the phallic exuberance of the satyrs suggested the humorous antics of comedy, while tragedy, the song sung for the sacrificed goat, centered on the necessary fall that would reconcile man to the deeper implications of his own mortality and the healthy accord of his society with the forces of the dead.

Parallel to the Dionysian gift of liquid nature was the dry food of Demeter's grain, upon which also could be grown a transmutation of a wild fungus. The vision that resulted from the carefully programmed ingestion of the ergot potion demonstrated the continuity of life and death and reaffirmed the forward progress of Hellenic civilization. The inclusion of mint in the Eleusinian potion had a similar symbolism with regard to this evolutionary theme, for the fragrant herb had connotations of illicit sexuality; the wild herb, therefore, was appropriately bruised and crushed for the barley drink that signified the transition of Persephone from sterile concubinage to a wifedom that mediated the chthonic realm of Hades and the Olympian of Demeter and Zeus. This joining of the house of the Olympians to that of the netherworld through Persephone's matrimony is another instance of the evolutionary paradigm. The Mysteries were sacred to what was called a "holy duo of goddesses", who need not be named specifically as Demeter and her daughter Persephone, for there was a singularity in their twoness that made their roles interchangeable. The original single Earth Mother Goddess of pre-Olympian times has become a duo at Eleusis to signify the reconciliation of more primitive traditions to the new era of gods headed by a father in the heavens: Persephone has become a daughter of Zeus entrusted to the house of Hades in the earth and barred from Olympian status, but in the form of Demeter, her mother, the Great Goddess resides on Olympus with her brother Zeus. The sacred Eleusinian reconciliation, moreover, gave mankind, who in some traditions was not deemed essential to the world order as ruled over by Zeus, an intermediary role, communicating with the chthonic powers for the fertility that would yield the continuing cycles of rebirth upon which the Olympians themselves depended for nourishment in the form of sacrifice.

Just as the goddesses, so too were the Mysteries double. Whereas the emphasis of the Greater Mystery was redemption from death by the incorporation of the underworld's putrefaction into a larger scheme where it would function as a source of fertility, or, in agrarian terms, as manure instead of pollution, the Lesser Mystery, which preceded it by half a year, occurred in the wild and involved the preliminary to reintegration, the Dionysian theme of Persephone's illegal abduction by death while gathering intoxicating uncultivated flowers. In view of the role played by cultivated fungal parasites in the fermentation process and in the Eleusinian potion, we suggested in *The Road to Eleusis* that a wild mushroom may have figured in

the Lesser Mystery, for such a fungus would both complete the pattern and explain certain aspects of Dionysian symbolism, such as, for example, the fact that a mushroom itself could be viewed as a miniature *thyrsos*, with the intoxicating cap replacing the ivy leaves stuffed into the stalk-like stipe²¹.

VIII. Aja Ekapād

The Shade-foots, in whose company, as we have seen, Socrates appears to have communed with spirits in profanation of the Lesser Mystery, can be found also in Vedic traditions. The Hellenic migration into the Greek lands in the second millennium before Christ was only one branch of widespread migrations of Indo-European peoples, another group of which moved down from the north-west into what is now Afghanistan and the valley of the Indus. This latter group was the so-called Aryans, whose language was Vedic, a parent of classical Sanskrit. The canonical collection of 1028 hymns called the *R̥gVeda* preserves the ancient oral traditions of these people dating back to a time before the migrations when presumably they shared a common homeland with the other Indo-Europeans. We should expect to detect common elements and parallels between the Greek-speaking Indo-Europeans and the Vedic Aryans, as, in fact we can in their languages, poetic metaphors, and customs.

In the *R̥gVeda*, amidst a complex pantheon, headed by Indra, appears the god Soma, a plant that was pounded to extract a divine inebriant. This drink is described with symbolic components that, as has been recently shown²², are traceable back to an Indo-European original from which it apparently derived, for similar components occur also in the descriptions of magical drinks or potions in Greek traditions. Soma is often accompanied by Agni, the god of fire, and is richly described with formulaic epithets that note his color and metaphorically associate him with the bellowing of bulls, the pillar of the sky, the single eye, the navel, and so forth, although (remarkable for a plant) no mention is ever made of roots, leaves, blossoms, or seeds. It was this omission that attracted Wasson's notice. He demonstrated that a mushroom was the only botanic specimen that would fit such a description and that similar metaphors could be traced in later traditions about fungi.

Through oversight, however, Wasson did not mention "Aja Ekapād" in the original edition of Soma, an omission that is repaired in his new introduction to the French edition²³. Aja Ekapād, as his name implies, is the "Not-born Single-foot", a deity mentioned six times in the *R̥gVeda* and apparently an archaic name for Soma himself, for he shares epithets with him, is often accompanied by the chthonic serpent who invariably is the guardian of the holy plant, and once even has only the first of his names linked to a common epithet of Soma as Aja Nābhi, the "not-born Navel". As Wasson observes, "Aja Ekapād" is the perfect binomial nomenclature for

a mushroom, for mushrooms are “not-born” since, as already mentioned, their seedless propagation by microscopic spores was not understood in antiquity, for which reason in India as in Greece (as well as elsewhere) they were thought to be engendered by the fire of the lightning bolt as they burst suddenly through the soil, expanding with the absorbed water of the rainfall, a manner of conception that the Greeks, in fact, gave to Dionysus. Similarly, although the “single-foot” attribute is, of course, common to all plants, it appears to be particularly apposite for mushrooms, which occur in folklore as the little men with only one foot, as in the following German riddle quoted by Wasson²⁴:

*Sag' wer mag das Männlein sein
Das da steht auf einem Bein?
Glückpilz! Fliegenpilz!*

The Shade-foots, who were also known to the Greeks with the botanical epithet of “One-legs”, and who came originally from the Indus valley, would seem, therefore, to be a Hellenic version of the deity Soma with the epithet Aja Ekapād. They survive into modern times amongst the Chukotka tribesmen in the region to the far north-east of Siberia. There, the spirits that reside in *Amanita muscaria* are said to materialize to those who become inebriated on the mushrooms as little people with a single leg; these leaping single-footed creatures, as numerous as the mushrooms that each has ingested, lead the intoxicated tribesmen on intricate and marvellous journeys to the land of the dead²⁵. These tribesmen, moreover, are so impressed with the prodigious strength of the mushrooms’ single leg that they often attempt to imitate them by thrusting their heads through some restraining membrane or by vigorously leaping about like the ancient jumping Shade-foots, with whom Socrates also communed with spirits in profanation of the Lesser Mystery.

The aptness of such a metamorphosis of mushrooms into little one-legged creatures is apparently something that suggests itself repeatedly to folk imagination, for it is thus also that they appear in the perhaps unrelated shamanic traditions of Meso-America²⁶. Our ancient leaping Shade-foots are, furthermore, actually recognized as red-capped mushrooms in the fabulous journey to the end of the world described in C. S. Lewis’s fictional *Voyage of the “Dawn Treader”*²⁷.

In antiquity we may surmise that the Shade-foots were present by and large throughout Siberia. Although the Greeks learned of them from the Indus valley sometime after the middle of the first millennium before Christ, they were probably present for millennia earlier in the forest belt, and other versions of them no doubt also came into the Greek lands with the arrival of the Indo-Europeans at the beginning of the Mycenaean Age. We perhaps catch a glimpse of them with another attribute of Soma as the Monophthalmoi or “One-eyes”, a fabulous people who lived on the frontier with the netherworld in the steppes north of the Black Sea and were called Arimaspeans in Scythian (Herodotus 3. 116, 4. 13, 27; Aeschylus, *Prome-*

theus 803 ff.). These One-eyes engaged in combat with the monstrous guardian beasts of the other-world and were the center of religious rites of shamanism proselytized in Greece by the priest and poet Aristaeus of Proconnesus, who was said to be able to metamorphose into a raven and to travel as a spirit separate from his body (Herodotus 4. 14 - 15). Other Monophthalmoi appear in Greek traditions as the "Orb-eyes" or Cyclopes. They are named individually with epithets of the lightning bolt (Hesiod, *Theogony* 139) and were reputed to be workmen of Hephaestus (Callimachus, *Hymn to Artemis* 46 ff.), the god of fire in the volcanic forge. It is in this form that they may have come with the Dorians, for they figure in the epic traditions of the *Odyssey* and were said to have built the fortifications of several cities in the Argolid (scholia to Euripides' *Orestes* 965), including Mycenae, which was supposedly so-named because its founder, a son of Zeus, had picked a mushroom there (Pausanias 2. 16. 3).

Analogues to their name as "Shade-foots" and "Cover-foots" can also be found in ancient India. In classical Sanskrit, "mushroom" is *chattrā*. It is formed from the root *chad*, "to cover" and has "parasol" as its primary meaning. This could not have been its name before the Indo-European migrations. Since parasols were not called for in northern climes, and indeed, were unknown until recently in the regions north of India, it is probable that the Aryan invaders found the utensil in use and named it with the Indo-European root when they came south, later extending the meaning by metaphor to include mushrooms.

The metaphor, moreover, is particularly apt in Greek. The Greek parasol, like ours today, was round and ribbed with toe-like spokes that resemble the webbed foot of water fowl, which had the epithet of "cover-footed" (*steganopodes*, Aristotle, *History of Animals* 504a7, etc.), as well as the gills of a mushroom. It was called the *skiadeion* (Aristophanes, *Birds* 1508), which is simply to say, the "little shade", and was thus an appropriate term for the little *skia*, the spirit or ghost that was the "shade" of former life to be summoned from the grave in a rite of necromancy.

IX. Prometheus as Shade-foot and the theft of fire

It remains for us to consider whether Aristophanes had any special reason for choosing Prometheus to bear the parasol as his standard. In the *Birds* each of the two parodies that we have been examining, that of the Shade-foots and the matching one of the Revealers and the Tongue-in-bellies, is introduced by a scene appropriately related to it. Thus, the Tongue-in-bellies at court are introduced by a scene in which Heracles humorously discovers that as a bastard son of Zeus he does not have a clear right of inheritance to his father's Olympian estate. In the same manner, the preceding scene with Prometheus carrying the parasol to shade himself from the view of Zeus overhead is a thematic introduction to the parody of Socrates' necromancy with the Shade-foots, for Prometheus clearly is himself being

presented as an impersonation of a Shade-foot, and his exit, furthermore, just before the parody, even imitates the carrying of the sacred basket beneath a parasol in a religious procession (1550 ff.).

Although Prometheus's quarrel with Zeus goes back to the time he stole fire from the gods, the traditions about that primordial theft suggest that the fire had connotations of herbalism. Prometheus was said to have hidden the stolen fire in a hollow fennel stalk or *narthex* (Hesiod, *Works and Days* 52; Aeschylus, *Prometheus* 109), thus treating fire like an herb gathered and stuffed into the Dionysian *thyrsos*; *narthex* itself, in fact, became a term for a casket of drugs, apparently because of such traditional usage in the gathering of magical and medicinal plants²⁸. It is significant, therefore, that Aeschylus in his *Prometheus* tragedy refers to the stolen fire as a "flower" or *anthos* (7) that was given to mankind as the source of that same intelligence and clairvoyance for which Prometheus or "Forethought" is himself named, including, in particular, knowledge of drugs and the mantic art (476 ff.).

This gift of the stolen fire was involved in the mystery traditions of the Kabeiroi, for the theft took place on the island of Lemnos (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 2. 10. 23) and had its source in the volcano there that was thought to be the forge of Hephaestus (Aeschylus, *Prometheus* 7)²⁹. It was to the primordial men of that island that Prometheus gave the fire. These men were called the Kabeiroi, the eldest of whom was supposed to have been born there from the earth itself³⁰. In art, the Kabeiroi were portrayed as dwarfish black caricatures of mythical figures. Their leader was called Kadmillos, apparently a diminutive version of Cadmus, who came from Phoenicia and founded Thebes, where there also was a mystery cult of the Kabeiroi. These traditions perhaps facilitated the transposition of the Shade-foots to a supposed homeland in the African deserts in later antiquity.

These aboriginal Kabeiroi to whom Prometheus entrusted the divine spark of intellect were in all probability originally a primitive race of botanic creatures, for autochthonous births such as theirs are suggestive of plants. Thus at Corinth, for example, the first men actually were said to have come into being by metamorphosis from mushrooms (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 7. 312 - 313; cf. Apollodorus 1. 9. 3); and at Thebes, Pentheus, who plays the role of the sacrificial surrogate for Dionysus in Euripides' *Bacchae*, was the son of the apparently "serpentine" Echion, one of the autochthonous Spartoi, the men who were said to have been "sown" by Cadmus from what is usually called in English the "teeth" of the primordial serpent. If we translate the term more exactly for its context, it is clear that such "teeth" must obviously be "fangs" and hence we are dealing here with a mythical tradition about toxic botanic forms. At Athens too, we can note a similar complex of metaphors suggesting that botanic drugs were involved in the symbolism of primordial autochthony, for Erichthonius, the "Very Chthonic" son who was born from earth out of the seed either of Hephaestus or Prometheus, was said to have bitten the nurses (Apollodorus 3. 187) to whom Athena entrusted him and to have caused thereby their death in the ensuing fit of madness (Pausanias 1. 38. 3; Euripides, *Ion* 21 ff.).

The traditions about Hephaestus also suggest botanic paradigms for the fire that set the aboriginal creatures on the track of evolution to a higher state of being. It is no happenstance that both Prometheus and Hephaestus, as we have just seen, were said to have fathered the primordial Athenian, for they often double for each other in myth and hence it is likely that they were originally simply different aspects of the same figure, with Prometheus's so clearly transparent name merely an epithet for the other³¹.

It is Hephaestus, the god of volcanic fire, who is responsible for tormenting Prometheus and his brother Titans for their opposition to Zeus and the tyranny of his newly established rulership that at first was not reconciled to the existence of man, Prometheus's own creation. Such fiery torment that is a burden of self-inflicted sacrifice recalls the close association of Soma and the fire god Agni and is suggestive of the pattern of shamanic initiation or *askesis*.

To trace this idea, let us look first at the traditions involving the lame Hephaestus with magical plants and intoxication in his tormenting of the Titans. For example, as punishment for the giant or "Earth-born" Typhon, Zeus was said to have confined him in the volcano of Aetna (Aeschylus, *Prometheus* 351 ff.), which, like the volcano on Lemnos, was thought to be a forge of Hephaestus (*Prometheus* 366 ff.). This punishment parallels that of Prometheus's brother Atlas, who stood as "the pillar between heaven and earth" in the Garden of the Daughters of the West, the so-called Hesperides (*Prometheus* 347 ff.). The mountain with the core of fire and the special garden where magical plants grow are probably to be recognized as analogous versions of the World Axis or *axis mundi*, the place where the Tree of Life grows, allowing the shaman to ascend or descend to other realms in the torment of his *askesis*. This place is at the ends of the earth, hence, as with the Hesperides, in the place where the sun goes down. Analogous to it is the place of the dawn. Thus Hephaestus bound Prometheus in the far east, a topographical counterpoise to the torment of his brother in the land of the evening, and like the latter, it too is a place where special herbs grow. On his quest for the so-called "apples of the Hesperides", Heracles will visit Prometheus as well as Atlas, for the two distant locales are bound by the daily journey of the sun through the darkness of the night, a trip that Heracles, who also will experience the shamanic *askesis*, was said to have taken by sailing in the fiery sun's own *depas* or "drinking cup" (Stesichorus 8. 1; Pherecydes 18a), a utensil that suggests that the voyage is one of intoxication³², and that Hephaestus, who fashions such metal cups in his forge (Aeschylus, fr. 69), may again be involved.

Other traditions also associate both the eastern and western locales with the shaman's fiery plant, for the word in Greek for the "apple" that was to be found growing in the Garden of the Hesperides is verbally indistinguishable from the golden fleece of the "sheep" (*melon*) that was hung on the tree in Medea's land in the far east³³. It was that fleece that had transported the children of the "hallucinatory" Nephele to that other-world environment. The equivalence of the two topographical extremes can also be sensed from

the fact that the so-called "Queen" Medusa, the Gorgon, was located in both places (Hesiod, *Theogony* 274 ff.; Aeschylus, *Prometheus* 790 ff.). On a vase painting from southern Italy, we glimpse a remembrance that the fruit of the Medusa's special tree was a mushroom³⁴.

Prometheus himself, in some traditions, was apparently the magical plant. A miraculous herb, parasitic on a tree and in color like the crocus, was said to grow from the blood of Prometheus in his torment. Medea picked it to anoint Jason (or Iason, in Greek, apparently so named for this anointing with the drug³⁵ that will protect him from the fire-breathing bulls guarding the tree with the golden fleece); when the plant was thus harvested, Prometheus himself groaned, according to the way that Apollonius Rhodius told the story, for the plant is said to grow from a double stem. In picking the Promethean herb, Medea is also in contact with the suffering Titan bound to his mountain, for which reason the root of the plant when it is plucked was said to resemble the flesh of a corpse that has just been cut (*Argonautica* 3. 845 ff.).

The fiery Titanic drug found at the tree on the mountain in the lands where the sun is kindled and extinguished appears, as Wasson has shown³⁶, to have had a fungal prototype in the homeland of the Indo-Europeans. In Siberia, the paradigmatic shaman's Tree is the shining white birch that is host not only to the mycorrhizal parasitic *Amanita muscaria* growing at its base, but also to the steps of shelf fungus ascending its trunk. The latter, "punk" or *Fomes fomentarius*, provides the tinder for making fire with a fire drill, thus associating the gift of fire with the shaman's ascent to the fiery realm of his visions.

The torment of *askesis* passes from sufferer to sufferer, a labor like the sun's, forever renewed. It is upon the basis of this primitive experience in primordial times that culture is founded and continually renewed. The myth of Heracles, for example, is a case in point. He was said to have fought many poisonous monsters in order to tame the earth for mankind and to establish the reign of his divine father Zeus. His burning torment came upon him when his wife Dejanira anointed his robe with the drops of poison that came originally from one of the monstrous beasts he had killed (Sophocles, *Women of Trachis* 831 ff., 1140 ff.). In another tragedy, he was shown in a mad state, poisoned by this same primordial source (Euripides, *Heracles* 1189 ff.). This intoxication represents his regression to a primitive state, to a time before the world was civilized, when he, who would eventually pacify the earth and show the way to reconciliation with the heavens, was still a dwarfish creature called a *Daktyl* or "finger man"³⁷. The dichotomy between primitivism and culture at the Eleusinian Mysteries can be detected in the tradition that claimed that this poisoned and primitive Heracles underwent purification at the Lesser Mystery (Apollodorus 2. 5. 12; Diodorus Siculus 4. 14; scholia to Aristophanes' *Plutus* 1013) in order to prepare him for his initiation into the Greater. Heracles, however, can be freed from his poisoned state and restored to his Olympian destiny only by passing the venom to another who will play the role of the primitive sufferer. Thus, on

the pyre that was eventually lit on the mountaintop of Oeta, Heracles escaped from his mad torment, giving his venomed arrows and bow to a member of the family of Poeas, whose name suggests that he had a botanic identity³⁸. The words for “poison” and “arrow” (*ios*) are identical in Greek, and the transference of the bow apparently entails also the contamination by its metaphoric complex of primitivism and toxicity. Thus when we hear of this bow again, it is in the hands of Philoctetes, a son of Poeas. He was shown in Sophocles’ tragedy yearning to be burnt in the Lemnian volcano of Hephaestus (*Philoctetes* 800, 986 ff.), a release from torment analogous, as he claims, to the fiery consummation that he once afforded Heracles on Oeta (801 ff.). Instead, cursed by his inheritance, he must live a primitive existence, dragging his poisoned foot in a track like the primordial serpent’s (163, 291) and hunting for food that necessarily is tainted with the arrow’s toxin (105, 166). Periodically he falls into fits of madness that are described as a wild kind of intoxication, ungraced by the evolution of the custom of communal drinking of tempered wine (213, 712 ff.). Eventually, he too, it was said, passed the role of sufferer to another, when he shot Paris at Troy on his foot with an arrow, while he himself was reintegrated with society and his own foot healed with curative herbs and wine (Apollodorus, *Epitome* 8 ; Tzetzes, *On Lycophron* 911).

Prometheus too could be freed from his torment on the mountain to which Hephaestus unwillingly had bound him only by passing his role to another. Thus it was said that the centaur Chiron was poisoned when Heracles accidentally shot him on his foot as the other centaurs fought in their typically uncivilized way to drink from a newly opened jar of wine. Despite Chiron’s vast knowledge of drugs and herbs, a lore he was said to have taught many heroes in their youth spent with him in the wilderness, he was unable to heal himself. Heracles at last freed Prometheus by offering Chiron as a substitute (Apollodorus 2. 5. 11).

We cannot expect that Aristophanes reacted consciously to the full implication of presenting Prometheus as a Shade-foot, although it is perhaps possible that in the Kabeiric mystery traditions something was known that is now lost. Much, however, of what we have been discussing in the patterns of myth probably represents the inheritance of traditions from very ancient times whose meaning the classical writers did not question. Embedded in those traditions was a special value placed on lameness, like that of Hephaestus, Oedipus, and Philoctetes, or on single-footedness, as in the case of the “one-shoed” (Apollodorus 1. 9. 16) Jason. The obvious psychological aptness of such an attribute of heroism no doubt facilitated its perpetuation, but the consistent way that it is incorporated as a detail in a larger complex involving the young hero’s exposure to a mountainous wilderness of toxic plants as a preliminary to his reintegration with the civilized world suggests that the “one-leg” paradigm, with its botanic manifestations, derives from the same ancient metaphor that in a more bizarre form was preserved as the Shade-foots.

Part of that ancient inheritance of heroic paradigms clearly derives from tales of shamans in primordial times. The torment of Prometheus and

his brother Titans represents the toil imposed upon them by the new race of gods ruled by Zeus. The eagle that once was symbolic of Prometheus's flight toward the celestial realm has been expropriated as an emblem for Zeus. Prometheus no longer flies. Instead, chained to the eastern mountains that in the Iranian traditions were the home of the magical herb, he is tormented by the eagle who feasts repeatedly on the liver that was the seat of the Titan's power of divination³⁹. The mountain itself, with its volcanic core, provides a passageway down to the netherworld (Aeschylus, *Prometheus* 1080 ff.), just as the holy plant found on its slopes afforded transport to the fiery heavens. His eventual release is symptomatic of the great reconciliation that reapportioned the world amongst the earlier and later races of gods and found room as well for the humans that were his creation. With the stolen fire, at a place called Mekone, apparently named for the "Poppy" and sacred to Demeter and Persephone⁴⁰, he taught mankind how to sacrifice, cooking the edible parts of the butchered victim and burning the rest for the gods. In doing this, his shamanism, for so the name of the place would suggest, set man in his vital role in the cosmos and began the arduous evolution toward the civilized arts, for in every repetition of such sacrificial eating, the Greeks retraced, in culinary symbolism, the steps of their long progress toward culture⁴¹. Without the ritual, mankind could not come to terms with the horrible realization that life is nourished, just like plants, by what is dead, and that primitivism, as in the maenadic ceremonies, must be tended as the fertile foundations of civilization.

In addition to the common Indo-European heritage of traditional metaphors and religious ideas, however, the close proximity of the Greeks to their eastern neighbors no doubt also added to the storehouse of myth. Thus, the hero's Promethean flight with the eagle in search of Soma or the magical potion can be found in the traditions of the Indo-Iranian peoples⁴². Its earliest written account appears in *R̥gVeda* 4. 26 and 27, with parallels in the *Avesta* and later texts, as well as in the literature and art of Mesopotamia. In addition to the similarity to the Prometheus myth, the same story seems to underlie the traditions about the eagle who brings nectar to Zeus⁴³ and the myth of Ganymedes' abduction from a mountain by Zeus in the guise of an eagle so that the handsome youth might serve nectar on Olympus as cupbearer to the gods (Homer, *Iliad* 20. 331 - 335; Vergil, *Aeneid* 5. 252 ff.; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10. 155 - 161). The eagle traditionally sits in the branches of the shaman's tree. Perhaps this image too is detected in Greek, in Nonnus's description of a blazing olive tree off the coast of Tyre with an eagle at its top holding a libation cup (*Dionysiaca* 40. 467 ff.)⁴⁴.

Of particular interest for our interpretation of Prometheus's impersonation of a Shade-foot in the *Birds* are three reliefs from the temples at Sanchi and Amarāvati in India built in the first and third centuries A.D., but employing traditional symbolism that is certainly much older and which is essentially not different from that found in the eastern Mediterranean⁴⁵. On these reliefs, the Tree of Life is shown as a pillar between earth and sky,

resting on an *omphalos* or Navel Stone and surmounted by sunshades, apparently as indication of the fiery brilliance of the higher realm.

X. Philosophers

Aristophanes' parody of Socrates' necromancy in the Swamp makes clear that the symbolism of the Aryan fungus played an essential role in the Lesser Eleusinian Mystery. As with Soma, of course, it is possible that surrogates or substitutes were actually employed by the classical period, although the attributes of the original were in some form retained. Thus, the color of Medea's Prometheus herb is roughly consistent with the Vedic traditions, as is that also of the ergot fungus of the Greater Mystery. A similar spectrum of sacred color is described in Pindar's *Sixth Olympian Ode* as characteristic of the magical herb that was responsible for the primordial source of inspiration for the mythical ancestor of the Iamidae, the prophets who continued to practice divination at the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia⁴⁶. We should not conclude, moreover, that the *Amanitas* were not to be found in ancient Attica, for it was doubtless a deadly species of that genus that was responsible for the accidental deaths commemorated by Euripides in a famous epigram (Eparchides, quoted in Athenaeus 2. 61 a - b). And in the forested regions of modern-day Greece, the country people retain a knowledge of edible and inedible species⁴⁷.

By sending Peisander into the Swamp to consult Socrates amongst the Shade-foots, Aristophanes was cutting through appearances and showing up the vigorous prosecutor of the investigation into the scandal of the recent profanations as basically no other than he would soon turn out to be, an aristocrat like the now infamous Alcibiades, whose democratic demagoguery would last only so long as it suited his own political ascendancy. Like the other students at what Aristophanes in the *Clouds* had called Socrates' *phrontisterion* or "thinkshop", Alcibiades and Peisander both could be expected to have learned from the philosopher to despise convention and speak with the deceitful rhetoric of the Tongue-in-bellies.

It would appear, therefore, from our discussion of the scene of necromancy that the common suspicion about people like Socrates was that they were apt to have derived their ideas about other realities and about the relativity of everything to be found in this present world from drug-induced visions. In rehabilitating the reputation of his teacher, a man who had been put to death for impiety, Plato chose precisely a time just before the scandal of the profanations to portray Socrates at Agathon's symposium as a person subject to spontaneously generated periods of mystical trance and to emphasize the non-erotic involvement and growing separation between the philosopher and his drunken disciple Alcibiades. That, however, was not what was commonly believed by Socrates' contemporaries. To them, he seemed to speak of experiences that resembled those of a shaman, and his unconventional manner of life and his novel deities made it likely that he acted as a mystagogue for the young men devoted to him.

He was, in fact, not unlike other early philosophers whose lives and ideas have been recognized as shamanistic⁴⁸. Amongst them, let us recall only Empedocles, who was said to have attempted to prove his divinity by jumping into a volcano, leaving behind only a single sandal (Heraclides 77 Voss). In his life he had a great reputation as a healer and, as he himself says, he was sought out in his native Sicily by many who wanted prophecies or drugs (111, 112 Diels). He died when Socrates was in middle age, but the characteristic life of such men, as the necromancy parody shows, still set the expected pattern for wise men in Athens at the end of the century. Even Plato in the following decades would describe his master's devotion to wisdom by the metaphor of the inspiring god of Love, the child of ragged poverty, who spent his whole life in philosophic quest, an enchanter and herbalist and sophist (*Symposium* 203 d).

NOTES

- 1 The real identity of the Shade-foots had become a futile topic for grammarians by the Christian era. Even as early as the fifth century, some people thought of them as African or Libyan (Antiphon 80 B 45 Diels; Archippus 53 Edmonds), and it was there that the scholars of the Hellenistic age placed them, for their parasol-like feet could be rationalized as a peculiar adaptation to the African heat, a bias that even endowed these poor suffering creatures eventually with the normal complement of limbs, the better to crawl about from exhaustion on all fours in the desert (scholia to Aristophanes' *Birds* 1553).

The valley of the Indus, however, must have been their original homeland, for that was the testimony of the earliest travelers, and even the fifth-century orator Antiphon, who thought they were Libyan, had apparently read of them in our earliest source, the Indian travels of Scylax (Antiphon 80 B 47 Diels). The confusion between an Indian and African homeland for the Shade-foots is understandable in view of the map made by the sixth-century Hecataeus, who placed the Ethiopians in the East along the entire region bordering the sea that separates Africa from India. By the Hellenistic age, however, these "African" Shade-foots were reinterpreted as living in what was then considered to be Africa, the torrid regions to the west of Alexandria.

In identifying the Shade-foots' homeland as the Indus valley, I follow Roscher, *Ausführliches Lexicon der Griechischen und Römischen Mythologie*, and differ from the judgement recorded in Pauly-Wissova, *Real-encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (see articles on "Sciapodes").

- 2 The Hellenistic scholars believed that there were two Peisanders, one who was slight and the other big (Eupolis, *Marikas* fr. 182 Edmonds; Plato Comicus, *Peisander* fr. 101 Edmonds). There can be no doubt that the one in the necromancy scene is the famous cowardly demagogue, but it is also probable that the other one was nothing but an invention of the scholarly tradition to explain the apparent distinction between a Peisander called the "big one, the mule-driver" and another described as the "twisted one". The distinction is actually a misunderstood joke, comparing the penis of the offensive Peisander to that of someone of no account (see Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazuae* 516); hence in Hermippus (*Artopolides* fr. 9 Edmonds), "the big Peisander mounted in silence a pack-ass with olive-wood sinews, like the one for the wood at the Dionysia", with a pun on the sexual meaning of "mount" and the action of mounting the speaker's platform. The "bigness" of a politician, even though he be cowardly, is an indication of the trouble he can cause the Demos (see *Birds* 1477, on the demagogue Cleonymus). See also Danny Staples, *Pea Pteroenta: Plot and Metaphor in Aristophanes* 78 (unpublished dissertation, Boston University, 1978).

3 A fragment of a bas-relief, now in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens, originally from the sanctuary on the Ilissos River where the Lesser Mystery was celebrated, shows Heracles, holding the pitcher-shaped cup that is characteristic of the Anthesteria Festival, as he arrives for his initiation into the Lesser Mystery.

For a compilation of sources relevant to the Anthesteria, see Sir Arthur Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals at Athens*, second edition revised by J. Gould and D. Lewis (Oxford, 1968).

The interpretation of the "sacred marriage" as a shamanic ritual is presented in R. Gordon Wasson, Albert Hofmann and Carl A. P. Ruck, *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1978) 38 ff., 85 ff.

4 Carl A. P. Ruck, On the sacred names of Iamos and Ion: Ethnobotanical referents in the hero's parentage. *The Classical Journal*, 71/3 (1976) 235 - 252.

5 In addition to the documentation from Aristophanes cited in the text, note also that Socrates is portrayed by both Plato and Xenophon, himself an ardent admirer of Sparta, as praising the Dorian institutions of Crete and Lacedaemon (Plato, *Crito* 52 e, *Republic* 544 c, *Laws* 634; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 3. 5, 4. 4).

6 It is surprising that this reference to the recent profanations has apparently gone unnoticed, despite the fact that Socrates is labelled as a pro-Spartan in this very comedy. Previous readers of the Shade-foot ode have been misled into thinking that the Swamp must be a foreign place since the fabulous one-footed creatures are in it, although so are three Athenians; it has also not been noticed that the Tongue-in-bellies are equally fabulous, but this ode, which is clearly a complement to the former, describes an Athenian court of law.

7 See note 3, above.

8 "Entheogen" is a term that I and a number of collaborators have proposed to replace "psychotropic" "hallucinogenic" "psychedelic" and similar words in current usage, all of which have unfortunate connotations of contemporary drug use or of adverse judgements about altered states of consciousness as imitative of psychoses. An entheogen is defined in a strict sense as "only those vision-producing drugs that can be shown to have figured in shamanic or religious rites; in a looser sense, the term could also be applied to other drugs, both natural and artificial, that induce alterations of consciousness similar to those documented for ritual ingestion of traditional entheogens." This term does away with the awkwardness of having to say, for example, that a shaman took a psychedelic drug. See Ruck, Bigwood, Staples, Ott and Wasson, *Entheogens. Journal of Psychedelic Drugs*, 11/1 - 2 (Jan. - Jun., 1979) 145 - 146.

9 R. Gordon Wasson, *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1968).

10 Wasson summarizes the developments since the initial publication of *Soma* in the introduction to the new French translation. The original English text of this introduction appeared as: *Soma Brought Up-to-date. Botanical Museum Leaflets, Harvard University* 26/6 (June 30, 1978) 211 - 223, published also in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 99/1 (1979).

11 Stella Kramrisch, The Mahāvīra vessel and the plant Pūtika, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 95/2 (April - June, 1975) 222 - 235. Wasson and the French mycologist Roger Heim had discovered that amongst the Munda-speaking Santal of Orissa and Bihar, India, the sole member of the vegetable kingdom to be classified grammatically as animate, as "possessing a soul", is a single species of mushroom called "putka": Heim and Wasson, *Les Putka des Santals: Champignons doués d'une âme. Cahiers du Pacifique*, 14 (Sept., 1970) 60 - 85. Kramrisch shows that putka is a loan word from Sanskrit preserved in Santal, although lost from all Sanskrit vernaculars, and that putka is to be identified with *pūtika* (cognate with "putrid"), a hitherto unidentified Sanskrit plant that was mixed with clay in the ceremony of making the Mahāvīra vessel. Characteristic of the putka mushrooms are their rapid corpse-like decomposition and ensuing putrid odor. In the firing of the Mahāvīra vessel, the mortality symbolized by the *pūtika* plant was transformed into fragrance.

- 12 The Wassons privately shared this idea with each other, although it does not appear in their massive compilation of mushroom lore: Valentina Pavlovna and R. Gordon Wasson, *Mushrooms, Russia, and History* (Pantheon Books, New York, 1957). Documentation for the theory was first forthcoming in Wasson's ensuing North American and Meso-American researches.
- 13 R. Gordon Wasson, George and Florence Cowan and Willard Rhodes, *Mariá Sabina and her Mazatec Mushroom Velada* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1974).
- 14 Keewaydinoquay, *Puhpohwee for the People: A Narrative Account of Some Uses of Fungi Amongst the Ahnishinaubeg* (Botanical Museum of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, February, 1978). Keewaydinoquay is also collaborating on a further study with Wasson.
- 15 Otto J. Sadvoszky, *Demonstration of a Close Genetic Relationship, Preliminary Report* (Fullerton, CA, July 3, 1978).
- 16 R. Gordon Wasson, The divine mushroom: Primitive religion and hallucinatory agents. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 102 (1956) 221 - 223.
- 17 For documentation, see Wasson *et al.*, *The Road to Eleusis* (note 3, above) 77 ff.
- 18 C. Kerenyi, working with Dr. Albert Hofmann, suggested that *Mentha pulegium* may have been responsible for the Eleusinian vision: *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter* (Pantheon, New York, 1967, translated from the German manuscript revised by the author from publications in 1960 and 1962) appendix 1. Dr. Hofmann, however, now claims that Kerenyi overstated the psychoactive properties of *Mentha pulegium*, and, in any case, this mint is clearly not strong enough to have warranted those instances of profane use and attendant severe penalties that were occasioned during the great scandal of 415 B.C. The inclusion of *blechon* in the Eleusinian potion had a symbolic significance, as explained below. See also Wasson *et al.*, *The Road to Eleusis* (see note 3, above) 100 ff.
- 19 Attic black-figured vase in the British Museum, storage-jar by Exekias, B 210, about 540 B.C., the elder Dionysus holding ivy sprigs confronts his son. Krater by the Altamura painter in the Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Ferrara, the elder Dionysus, Attended by flower-bearing maenads, seated and holding the *thyrsos*, confronts his smaller self in the form of his son standing on his lap and bearing sprigs of vine and a cup of wine. *Etc.*
- 20 Theophrastus, *History of Plants* 9. 16. 2. See Wasson *et al.*, *The Road to Eleusis* (see note 3, above) 85 ff.
- 21 Apicius 7. 15. 6. See Wasson *et al.*, *The Road to Eleusis* (see note 3, above) 118 ff.
- 22 Calvert Watkins, Let us now praise famous grains, *Indo-European Studies III* (Cambridge, MA, 1977) 468 - 498.
- 23 The oversight was first corrected in Wasson's *Soma and the Fly-Agaric: Mr. Wasson's Rejoinder to Professor Brough* (Botanical Museum of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, November, 1971) 37 - 38, and repeated in "Soma Brought Up-to-date" (see note 10, above).
- 24 Wasson, *Soma Brought Up-to-date* (see note 10, above) 221.
- 25 Wasson, *Soma* (see note 9, above) 159 and exhibits 4, 22, and 42.
- 26 For documentation, see R. Gordon Wasson, *The Wondrous Mushroom: Mycolatry in Meso-America* (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1980).
- 27 C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* (Macmillan, New York, 1952) 141 ff.
- 28 Thus *Narthex* was used as the title for medical works by Heras, Cratippus, and Soranus (Galen 12. 398, 959; Aëtius 8. 45); *narthex* also is apparently synonymous with *thyrsos* (Euripides, *Bacchae* 147, 706); see, however, E. R. Dodds (*Euripides' Bacchae*, Oxford, 1944, note on lines 144 - 150), who thinks that the *narthex* may be a torch at line 144, although, as he observes, the Bacchant torch seems to have been a simple bundle of pine twigs and not a fennel stalk.

If we view the *narthex*/*thyrsos* as a container for gathered herbs or drugs, is it perhaps significant that Euripides' *narthex*, in the former passage, seems to contain Syrian frankincense (on the psychoactive properties of which, see Dioscorides, *On Medicinal*

- Substances* 1. 81, and Wasson *et al.*, *The Road to Eleusis* (see note 3, above) 90 ff.), and in the latter passage, that the *narthex* is instrumental in causing a natural and not cultivated source of "wine"? Note that this so-called "wine" is clearly not the intoxicant grown from the cultivated vine, for the herdsman who narrates the horrible maenadic experience that he has witnessed ends his account by praising the gentle effects of the wine from the Dionysian vine, an anodyne such as the wild, found "wine" of the maenads on the mountain clearly is not (769 ff.). In the same manner, we are told that the maenads' experience does not involve the eroticism commonly associated with the civilized procedure of tempering the cultivated wine with water at a symposium although such a ceremony is amongst the god's blessings to mankind (686 ff., 773 ff.). The maenads' "wine" is a natural substance, like water and honey and milk, that springs up from the uncultivated ground or is gathered up from the wild earth with one's fingers and that is associated with the ivy leaves stuffed into the *thyrsos* (704 ff.); it appears while the maenads are engaged in mothering wild beasts and gathering wild herbs (702 ff.).
- 29 C. Kerényi, *Prometheus: Archetypal Image of Human Experience* (Pantheon, New York, 1963, translated from the German versions of 1946 and 1959) 80 ff.
- 30 Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 5. 7. 4. See Kerényi, *Prometheus* (see note 29, above) 80 - 81.
- 31 Kerényi, *Prometheus* (see note 29, above) 57 - 62.
- 32 Lesley Cafarelli, *Temenos and Skene: Enclosure Motifs in Greek Poetry and Myth* (unpublished dissertation, Boston University, 1978).
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 Amphora from the third quarter of the fourth century B.C., now in the Pergamon Museum, East Berlin (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antiken-Sammlung, inv. no. F 3022), See Wasson *et al.*, *The Road to Eleusis* (see note 3, above) plate 8.
- 35 The name Iason contains the same *ia-* root that occurs in words such as *iatros* ("healer" or "doctor") and *iasthai* ("to heal"). In addition to the anointment by Medea, Iason is associated with drugs through his education in his youth in the wilds with the centaur Chiron. See Ruck, On the sacred names of Iamos and Ion (see note 4, above).
- 36 Wasson, *Soma* (see note 9, above) 216 ff. In Siberia, birch-bark containers were stuffed with punk, which deprived of air by tight packing would harbor the smouldering fire for upwards of two days. This custom invites comparison with the tradition of Prometheus's theft of fire hidden in the *thyrsos* or *narthex*, for the marrow of the giant fennel was used as tinder and even in modern times on some of the Greek islands is still the means of preserving the glowing embers or of carrying them from place to place (for references see Kerényi (see note 29, above) 80).
- 37 For a discussion of the tragic hero as reversion from Olympian to chthonic or Dionysian symbolism, see Ruck, Duality and the madness of Herakles. *Arethusa*, 9/1 (1976) 53 - 75.
- 38 Poëas (or more exactly Poias) is perhaps to be related to the word for "herb", *poie*.
- 39 On hepatoscopy and the wounding of Prometheus, see Kerényi, *Prometheus* (see note 29, above) 39 - 40. For an interpretation of Prometheus's torment by the eagle as shamanic *askesis*, see E. A. S. Butterworth, *The Tree at the Navel of the Earth* (Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 1970) 201 ff.
- 40 Kerényi, *Prometheus* (see note 29, above) 42 ff. Mekone was supposed to be located in the vicinity of the Peloponnesian city of Sicyon, near Corinth.
- 41 Marcel Detienne, *Dionysos Slain* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1979, translated from the French edition of 1977) 68 - 94.
- 42 David M. Knipe, The heroic theft: Myths from *RgVeda* IV and the ancient near east. *History of Religions*, 6/4 (1967) 328 - 360. See also the discussion of Greek and Eastern traditions associating heat with the light of mystical vision and with shamanic *askesis* in Butterworth, *Tree at the Navel of the Earth* (see note 39, above) 133 ff.
- 43 D'Arcy W. Thompson, *Glossary of Greek Birds* (Oxford, 1936 2nd edn.) 180 - 184.
- 44 Butterworth, *Tree at the Navel of the Earth* (see note 39, above) 85 ff.

- 45 *Ibid.* 49 ff. and plates 11 - 13.
 46 Ruck, On the sacred names of Iamos and Ion (see note 4, above).
 47 Personal correspondence from informants in Greece.
 48 E. R. Dodds, The Greek shamans and the origin of puritanism, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951) 135 - 178.

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