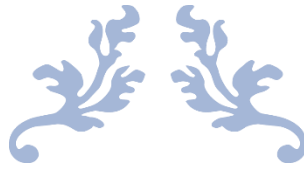




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Persephone: Monarch, Mother, and Monster

A study of Persephone in context to her role and dominion as portrayed
in ancient literature



*'A dissertation submitted to the
University of Wales Trinity Saint David
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of MArts in Classical
Civilisations'*

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Abstract

The following dissertation aims to provide the reader with a detailed insight to Persephone and all the roles that she has as a Greco-Roman deity.

The first chapter explores the connection between Sumerian and Greco-Roman beliefs of the underworld and the afterlife through the examination of the stories in the surviving ancient texts that can be found to be relevant to the idea of a queen of the realm of the dead. The next chapter analyses the evolution of Persephone: it looks at different titles and names that are often associated with her and reflects on their meaning in terms of her overall role. The examination of Orphic texts, both the *Hieroniman* and *Hellanicus* and the *Rhapsodic Theogony*, as well as Orphic *Hymns* found in the third chapter focuses primarily on the portrayal of Persephone as a deity with a connection to both Zeus and Dionysus Zagreus. The next section explores Persephone's dominion, the extent of her power over the faith of men, and her connection to the concept of rebirth. Chapter five attempts to provide an understanding to the depiction of Persephone as the creator of mankind, and her role as guide for the shades of the underworld. The last section serves as an overview of the different instances in which the researched goddess is mentioned as a minor character, as well as, her connection to different gods found within her pantheon so that a better understanding of her character can be achieved.

Examining this particular goddess proves to be an observation on the extent of her dominion, which in turn could be understood as all aspects of human life.

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Introduction

In terms of ancient narratives, Persephone is often portrayed as a young maiden,¹ known for her connection to Demeter. Persephone is regarded as Hades' consort, Demeter's daughter, as well as, the goddess of spring.² It is worth mentioning that both Persephone and Demeter were worshipped in conjunction with the same mystery cult - the Eleusinian mysteries. They were a famous religious practice in Ancient Greece, however, due to the code of silence that was part of the nature of the mysteries, not much is known about them when it comes to the involvement and role of the goddess Persephone.³ When examining her character in context to the underworld, we encounter a queen goddess, a character with the power of bringing life and, overall a big player in the realm of the dead.⁴

It is important to note that before Persephone was seen as a Chthonic deity, she was known as *Kore*, which can be defined as 'girl' or 'maiden' in Ancient Greek.⁵ The distinction between her name before and after she was 'raped' and abducted by Hades, which depending on the source was either the result of a bargain between Hades and Zeus, or the following act of Hades'

¹ Hinds 1987.

² Hinds 1987; Apollod. 1.5; Ov. Met. 5.552-615.

³ Burkert 1987, Mylonas 1961:7

⁴ Hinds 1987.

⁵ Leeming 2005.

having seen her in a meadow collecting flowers,⁶ serves to showcase the duality of her character as seen in ancient narratives.

To label Persephone as a dual character suggests that there are two aspects to the goddess. Therefore, all the elements that are portrayed as part of the role of the Greco-Roman deity should be scrutinised. It is the aim of this research to analyse Persephone and the roles that were given to her through an examination of the different ancient literary sources that depict an image of the goddess in question. In order to gain an all-encompassing view of who Persephone was to Greek and Roman society, she cannot be studied only as the queen of the realm of the dead and consort to Hades. But, it is necessary to look at the mentions of the goddess that can be found in Orphic texts as well as the references to her in religion, meaning the cults and rites that she was associated with, as well as, myth, such as the tales in which she plays the role of a minor character.⁷

Furthermore, the goddess chosen for this investigation has many titles and names associated to her character. Due to the fluidity with which religion seem to have adapted in antiquity, in terms of myths traveling from culture to another, which in turn, could be seen as a reflection of society, its survival and the elements that made a culture, Persephone cannot be studied as a solely Greek figure. It is true that Roman society adapted Greek myths to fit their

⁶ Apollod. 1.5, Hinds 1987:25, Ov. Met. 5.552-615.

⁷ March 2008, Hinds 2012, Ware 2012, Wheeler 1999.

culture and religious practice,⁸ however, Greek myths can also be seen as the result of the adaptation of foreign beliefs.

In the context of deities associated to the underworld and the afterlife, it is important to see the established parallels to different cultures. Moreover, Chthonic deities are unique in a way that makes them follow their own rules and mythological patterns; whilst the rest of the gods that made up a pantheon adapted and transformed based on the changes that their respective society went through, Chthonic deities seem to either take longer to be adapted or did not change at all, presenting an amalgamation of sorts when it comes to religion. As a result of this amalgamation, Sumerian / Mesopotamian and Egyptian mythology will be discussed on this research, through the analysis of *The Descent of Inana* and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*,⁹ as well as, other sources such as Virgil's *Aeneid*,¹⁰ Homer's *Odyssey*,¹¹ Orphic Theogony,¹² and the Egyptian tale of Osiris, so that if there is a link between the stories of their respective underworld or afterlife with the role of the goddess Persephone, it can be explored and thus provide us with a better understanding of Persephone.

⁸ March 2008

⁹ The ETCSL project 2006, Frenkian 1960:89-105, Burkert 1995:65, Dalley 2008.

¹⁰Virg. Aen. 6.

¹¹ Hom. Od. 10-11

¹² Fragments in Bernabé 2003.

Of Mesopotamians, Greeks and the underworld

Each culture has its own set of myths and stories that aid to explain nature and different concepts, such as time, creation, and the afterlife. The realm of the dead has been understood as a different place, or even realm of existence from our own, with its own set of deities and rules. The Mesopotamian queen of the dead, Ereshkigal, presents us with a juxtaposition between how her culture showcases the queen and ruler in charge of the souls of the dead in contrast with the Greco-Roman queen of the underworld, Persephone or Proserpina. This chapter intends to establish a connection between the two deities, Ereshkigal and Persephone, through the evaluation of both characters within their respective roles in each of their cultures in order to study the link they present.

Ereshkigal is the '*Queen of the Great Below*',¹³ the land of the dead that was assumed to exist beneath the Mountains of Sunset to the west and was known as the 'land of no return', or *Kurnugia*, a realm of gloom beneath the surface of the Earth where the souls of the departed were said to drink from puddles of mud and consumed dust as a way of sustenance.¹⁴ Ereshkigal resided in her palace Ganzir, where she ruled over the souls of the dead, the

¹³ Heffron 2016, Mark 2017.

¹⁴ Kramer 1971:300.

palace was located at the entrance of the underworld and was guarded by Neti, a servant and priest to the queen.¹⁵

Hesiod is the first author to mention the abduction of Persephone, the story focuses on Hades and on how he, following Zeus' advice, took Kore against her will and proceeded to carry her off to the underworld, where she was to reside and rule by his side.¹⁶ Given that Persephone's mother, Demeter, was so outraged due to her daughter's sequestration, Zeus ordered Hades to return Persephone to the realm of the living, however, the god of the underworld gave his new consort pomegranate seeds, linking her to the underworld thus making her reside in the realm for part of the year.¹⁷ Zeus' involvement in Kore's kidnapping is very much dependant on the literature, however, the story never fails to state that Kore was taken to the underworld and that, due to the consumption of the pomegranate seeds, the goddess was compelled to spend part of the year acting as queen of the dead.

In contrast, Ereshkigal is not the subject of an abduction. Although both mythological characters play the role of queen of the realm of the dead in different cultures, the Mesopotamian deity's myth provides us with a different understanding of the rulers of the dead. Ereshkigal had, at the very least, four different consorts. The way in which the monarchy of the Mesopotamian court of the dead was portrayed, makes the female ruler the one with the utmost power. The queen of the Dead lacked a consort who was willing to stay with her in the underworld until Erra, also known as Nergal, god of war, was given

¹⁵ Bertman 2005, Kramer 1971, Leick 2010.

¹⁶ Hes. Th. 914

¹⁷ Comp. Hygin. Fab. 146 in Smith and Trzaskoma 2007, Hes. Th. 914.

to her as consort and agreed to stay in the underworld for part of the year,¹⁸ just like Persephone and Hades' case, however with their roles reversed. The uniqueness of Ereshkigal when it comes to the presentation of a female goddess as the ruler of the underworld is worth highlighting, although female goddesses lost the status that they once held in Mesopotamian history, as it can be interpreted from the fact that many of these goddesses were replaced by gods, Ereshkigal was never replaced as the ruler of the underworld.¹⁹

The Descent of Inanna is a poem that serves to illuminate Ereshkigal's role within her realm, this piece of Mesopotamian literature is thought to have been composed between 3500 B.C. and 1900 B.C.,²⁰ but scholars suggest that the poem could be dated to older times.²¹ Although the poem itself has been analysed many times in order to understand and evaluate the journey of Inanna,²² Ereshkigal should be studied as the main character since the poem acts as a piece where her praises are stated.²³ In this literary work, the goddess Inanna caused the death of Ereshkigal's husband.²⁴ Inanna decides to descend to the underworld, where she is clearly not welcomed and must go through the seven gates of the realm in order to reach the throne room.²⁵ Ereshkigal's servant and keeper of the gates, Neti, is instructed to make the Mesopotamian deity of love and beauty remove ornaments and clothing as she travels through each of the gates. Once she arrives at the throne room,

¹⁸ Kramer 1971:300, Bertman 2005.

¹⁹ Mark 2017, Heffron 2016.

²⁰ Dalley 2008., The ETCSL project: 2006.

²¹ Wolkstein and Kramer 1983, Kramer 1971, Dalley 2008.

²² Black and Green 1992, Burkert 1995.

²³ Wolkstein and Kramer 1983.

²⁴ Dalley 2008, The ETCSL project: 2006.

²⁵ Leick 2010, Dalley 2008.

Ereshkigal along with the judges find her guilty thus Inanna is killed, and her corpse is hung on the wall.²⁶ However, since Inanna expected nothing less from her sister Ereshkigal, her servant followed her instructions thus Inanna was brought back to life after three days and three nights of being dead in the underworld. Inanna's own consort and his sister, the deities of agricultural dying and reviving, were to take her place in the underworld given that the realm is the land of no return and no soul could go back to the world of the living without another one to replace it.²⁷

The Descent of Inanna highlights the symbolism presented by similar themes as does the tale of Demeter and her daughter's abduction by Hades. In the Mesopotamian tale, nothing can grow in the land of the living as long as the deities responsible for this task are trapped in the underworld, such is the case of Inanna's consort and his sister.²⁸ In the Greco-Roman myth, having eaten the seeds of the fruit of the dead, Persephone must spend half the year in the underworld with Hades,²⁹ during which time Demeter mourned the loss of her daughter, which meant that nothing would grow on the land above, flowers were not to bloom, and crops were to die until her daughter's return.³⁰ The later Greek story served to explain the seasons of the year when - Demeter and Persephone were together, the world was in bloom, but when Persephone returned to the underworld, winter was present thus the world was cold and lacking life. *The Descent of Inanna* has a direct connection with the

²⁶ Leick 2010, Dalley 2008.

²⁷ Leick 2010, The ETCSL project 2006.

²⁸ The ETCSL project 2006, Leick 2010, Dalley 2008.

²⁹ Apollod. 1.5, Hinds 1987:25, Ov. Met. 5.552-615.

³⁰ Comp. Hygin. Fab. 146 in Smith and Trzaskoma 2007, Hes. Th. 914.

story behind the disappearance of Persephone from the realm of the living. Moreover, it could be argued that the story behind the marriage of Ereshkigal and Nergal served to explain the seasons of war, given that conflicts were only waged for the duration of certain seasons.

There are different versions of the tale of the marriage between the Mesopotamian god of war and the queen of the Dead.³¹ In one account, Nergal visits the underworld where he is seduced by its queen thus resulting in him agreeing to be consort to Ereshkigal.³² A different version of the tale, and the most common of the two, describes Nergal's visit to the underworld as the consequence of him insulting Ereshkigal when he failed to rise from the banquet table before Ereshkigal's son, who was acting as her messenger, the queen demanded the war god descend to her realm where he was to be killed. However, since Nergal had fourteen demon escorts with him, two for each of the gates leading to the throne room, he was able to overpower the female deity and go back through the doors.³³ Ereshkigal proposed a marriage alliance where she was to share some of her power with the war god, thus he became her consort and, due to his demon escorts was able to leave the underworld for half of the year.³⁴

Having discussed the abduction of Kore and its counterpart from both Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman perspectives, it is worth questioning the nature of the connection between the two previously discussed queens of the underworld. On the one hand, Persephone and Ereshkigal are clearly linked

³¹ Kramer 1971, Bertman 2005.

³² Dalley 2008.

³³ Budge 2005, Kramer 1971, Bertman 2005.

³⁴ Leick 2010, Dalley 2008, Wolkstein and Kramer 1983.

through the notions of both being deities with royal roles, having to reside in the Underworld and having power over the souls of the departed. However, Hades presents us with a stronger connection to Ereshkigal in terms of actual duties and purpose of their roles. As was briefly discussed, the idea of male rulers was not always the norm in Mesopotamian culture, the fact that Hades rules over the underworld is not only a clear example of cultural difference, but it can also be seen as the outcome of the passage of time and overall notion of the development of a belief system. Another point that is worth highlighting is the overall depiction of Persephone throughout Greco-Roman literature - this particular character varies from acting as a consort to Hades to being the one in charge of dispatching the Furies and taking care of the punishment of the souls that require it.³⁵

Furthermore, the spirits of the dead seems to be regarded with fear in both Mesopotamian and Greek culture as Rodhe and Burkert suggest,³⁶ although some shades are seen as ghost with knowledge that heroes are in need of, there is an undertone of dread that accompanies the main characters during their interactions with the inhabitants of the realm of the dead.³⁷ The process of *Deutero-nekuia*, otherwise known as the trip to the realm of the underworld, and the conversations that heroes must endure with the shades of the realm of the dead,³⁸ serves to illustrate another connection between the Greek and Mesopotamian underworld, that being the libations to the dead and

³⁵ Hom. Od. 10.494.

³⁶ Burkert 1995:65. Rohde 1898.

³⁷ Burkert 1995:65-66

³⁸ Albinus 2000:82.

the rituals that needed to be performed in order to appease the dead.³⁹ Examples of Greek heroes dealing with shades of the underworld can be found in both *Homer's Odyssey* and *Virgil's Aeneid*.⁴⁰ In book 11 of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus, after seeking Circe for advice on how to reach the realm of the dead, is able to consult the shade of Teiresias,⁴¹ nevertheless Elpenor is the first shade that interacts with our hero.⁴² Virgil's account of Aeneas' journey through Dis, also known as the underworld, showcases the first encounter with a shade resident of Hades' realm is that of Palinurus.⁴³ A link between Aeneas' encounter with Palinurus and that of Odysseus with Elpenor can be established through the state in which the shades existed as well as their surroundings. Both shades were left to wander the banks of one of the rivers of the underworld, unable to be ferried by Charon and thus, reach the hall of judgement and with it, their final destination in the underworld due to the reason that their bodies lacked the required burial rites.⁴⁴

In regard to the description of the Underworld, Mesopotamian mythology describes the realm as a dark place where nothing is able to grow and, as a realm of gloom and misery;⁴⁵ the Homeric concept of Hades does not differ greatly from that of the Mesopotamian. As Burkert states, the underworld can be defined as a '*realm of mud and darkness that leaves no hopes for mortals*'.⁴⁶ This description of the underworld fits both Greco-Roman

³⁹Burkert 1995:65-68.

⁴⁰ Hom. Od. 11, Virg. Aen. 6.337-383.

⁴¹Hom. Od. 11

⁴²Hom. Od. 10.546.

⁴³ Virg. Aen. 6.337-383.

⁴⁴ Hom. Od. 10.546. Virg. Aen. 6.337-383.

⁴⁵ Sanders 1960, Leick 2010.

⁴⁶ Burkert 1995:65.

and Mesopotamian literature to an extent, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* further examines the aforementioned illustration,⁴⁷ written around 2150 -1400 BCE, the epic narrates the myths of ancient Sumeria through the life journey of Gilgamesh;⁴⁸ the second half of the epic, describes the underworld as a dead land, one where the dead suffer, or simply continue on from the last point when they were alive, meaning that simply are dead. It is worth mentioning that the moment in which Gilgamesh meets the ghost of his friend Enkidu can be linked to Homer, specifically, when the hero meets his first shade.⁴⁹

Moreover, the idea of Mesopotamian myths and beliefs traveling to different parts of the world is not a new one; throughout time, Mesopotamia was inhabited by Sumerians, Akkadians and Babylonians alike, easing the spreading of belief systems, music, customs and even language. The influence of this particular ancient culture can be found in both Egyptian and Greek cultures.⁵⁰ Its importance regarding the topic of the underworld and the overall concept of dealings between the living and the dead can be found in the notion of black magic as understood in ancient times. The sphere of black magic that seems to be attached to the underworld varies depending on the culture that we are studying.⁵¹ More often than not, we find that the dead who are capable of affecting the living are labelled as heroes in ancient Greek culture, bearing in mind that although considered heroes, they also have the

⁴⁷ Frenkian 1960:89-105, Gresseth 1975:1-18, Tournay and Shaffer 1994.

⁴⁸ Frenkian 1960:89-105, Burkert 1995:65, Dalley 2008, Koefoed 1983.

⁴⁹ Frenkian 1960:89-105, Burkert 1995:65. For more information on the links between Homer and the epic of Gilgamesh, see Gresseth 1975:1-18, Wirth 1921.

⁵⁰ Burkert 1931, Momigliano 1934, Farnell 1911.

⁵¹ Burkert 1995:68

power of bringing misfortune to those in the realm of the living.⁵² What is worth highlighting is the fact that ghosts play a primordial role in ancient religion.

In the case of Mesopotamian religion, the *etemmu*⁵³ is an essential part of human nature. The idea that humans are made up of two components, an earthly and a divine one that comes from a slain god who did not fully die but became a shadow in the underworld which allows for its essence to be left in the human body, is paramount to the understanding of human nature. Based on the belief that the *etemmu* play such an irreplaceable role in humanity, the importance of the realm of the dead for this ancient culture can be illustrated, furthermore, the underworld, its presence and role on the life of the individuals that made up this ancient society is validated. The Akkadian *etemmu* is the bringer of great illnesses, just as the dead had the power of being for the Greeks;⁵⁴ spirits are something to be feared or at least to be wary of in Greek mythology, the idea of an angry spirit, of the living having to deal with the wrath of the dead or *menima*,⁵⁵ is one that can be further examined in the surviving literary evidence, such as the case of Elpenor in the Odyssey who requests a proper burial in order to avoid becoming a *menima*.⁵⁶ The notion of evil spirits and black magic has been alive for centuries, as Burkert discusses.⁵⁷ A name that travelled from Sumer to Hellenistic Egypt and from there to Carthage and so on, is that of Ereshkigal, a Sumerian name that is indubitably attached to the terrible queen of the underworld, an infernal goddess who makes an

⁵² A fragment of Aristophanes demonstrates through comedy how dead heroes can bring afflictions to the living – Aristoph. Fr. 322 Kassel-Austin; see Burkert 1995:65

⁵³ Ghost, divine ghost in Mesopotamian religion. See Burkert 1995

⁵⁴ Burkert 1995:64-78

⁵⁵ Burkert 1995:66

⁵⁶ Hom. Od. 10. 509

⁵⁷ Burkert 1995:68-71.

appearance in later Greek defixions of magical papyri,⁵⁸ showing how far the Mesopotamian influence extended in terms of the underworld and its myths.

Maiden or Queen, what's in a name?

The myth of the abduction of *Kore* possesses a high level of popularity, the story has been retold countless times throughout generations, however, it is worth noticing that Homer does not discuss the goddess' capture by Hades. In Homer's account Persephone is viewed as a goddess completely connected to the realm of Hades, she is seen as the queen and wife of the god of the underworld,⁵⁹ she is depicted as a formidable queen that rules over the Shades and along with her husband, Persephone is responsible for carrying out the curses of the living upon the souls of the dead.⁶⁰ The House of Persephone, otherwise known as the groves of the aforementioned goddess, are mentioned by Homer as a landmark that borders the House of Hades, the groves are described as a place with poplars and willows that can be seen at the end of a narrow stand of the river Ocean.⁶¹

Persephone is referred to by Homer as '*dread Persephone*', this title could be seen as a reflection of her being a Chthonic deity. Having stated this, Homer's depiction of the goddess Persephone as queen of the underworld could be the result of different cultural influences on the author(s). *The Odyssey* is a story that can be dated and seen as belonging to the archaic

⁵⁸ See Burkert 1995:68

⁵⁹ Hom. Od. 10. 494, 11. 226, 385, 634

⁶⁰ Hom. Od. 10. 494, 11. 226, 385.

⁶¹ Hom. Od. 10. 509. For more information on the symbolism of the willows, see Rahner 1963, chapter 6.

period, the myth of Persephone could be the result of an adaptation by the Greeks of what different cultures had to say regarding deities related to the afterlife.

The way in which Persephone is mentioned in different literary sources is significant due to the nature of this investigation. In order to further study the mythological character of the queen of the Greco-Roman underworld, there must be an understanding of the different roles that the deity in question was depicted in and the context in which her name was used throughout the relevant ancient sources. The following chapter aims to examine the roles in which we can encounter Persephone.

Although the connection between the names of *Kore* and Persephone is quite clear, being that the first corresponds to Persephone as seen in association with Demeter and the latter possesses a direct link to Hades, it could be argued that Kore and Persephone seem to represent two completely different individuals. Based in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, the goddess of spring bounty was playing in a meadow whilst collecting flowers, it is at this moment that Hades, while doing an inspection of Mount Etna, takes notice of her existence and proceeds to abduct her.⁶² According to myth, once Persephone was rescued by Hermes and allowed to return to the realm of the living with the condition of returning to the underworld to spend part of the year acting as queen and consort to Hades, she became known as Persephone, leaving her

⁶² Based on Ovid's account, there seem to be two possible locations for the rape of Persephone. The first one being Sicily, at the landscape of Enna, Mount Etna whilst the second location is the Heliconian Fount, Mount Helicon. See Hinds. 1987:3-27.

Kore persona behind. The significance of the change in the name of the goddess of spring, can be seen as a representation of the loss of the goddess' maidenhood. Since Kore meant 'maiden' in Greek, it is safe to assume that the goddess did not possess an actual name until her abduction and subsequent rape by Hades.⁶³

Depending on the literary evidence, different aspects of the character of the Greco-Roman goddess of spring can be interpreted from the mention of her name as Persephone or Proserpina. Homer refers to the goddess as the consort/ wife of Hades thus making her the queen of the underworld.⁶⁴ As it was previously mentioned, Homer's description of Persephone in the *Odyssey* paints a character that has a strong connection to the realm of the dead and its residents,⁶⁵ the picture that Homer's audience sees is one where after death, a different realm where the souls of those who have passed exists, one with multiple grounds and where the monarchs who rule possess a court where judgement is passed and carried upon those who can be labelled as subjects of the underworld.⁶⁶ It is worth highlighting that there is no mention of the kidnapping of Persephone in this particular work, Homer portrays Persephone solely as a queen, unlike other authors such as Hesiod and later writers such as Virgil in his *Aeneid* and Ovid in his *Metamorphosis*.⁶⁷ Hesiod

⁶³ Hinds. 1987:3-27. *Apollod.* 3.6; *Hes. Th.* 918.

⁶⁴ *Hom. Od.* 10. 494, 509. 11. 226, 385, 634

⁶⁵ *Hom. Od.* 10. 509

⁶⁶ *Hom. Od.* 11. 226, 385, 634

⁶⁷ *Hes. Th.*, *Virg. Aen.*, *Ov. Met.*

is the first author to mention the abduction of Persephone, he does this in his *Theogony*, a poem that can be dated to as far as the 8th century BCE.⁶⁸

*“...Also, he came to the bed of all-nourishing Demeter, and she bore white-armed Persephone whom Aidoneus carried off from her mother; but wise Zeus gave her to him.”*⁶⁹

As can be observed in the above passage, the mention of Persephone’s abduction is nothing more than a comment; notwithstanding the fact that the passage itself focuses on the numerous affairs that Zeus had, Persephone is mentioned and so is the King of the underworld and his decision to take Persephone from her mother.⁷⁰ The relevance of the passage lies in the way that the queen of the underworld is mentioned, she is called by the name that she received after being raped, making the reference to her abduction a way of easing the recognition of the character. In short, one of the myths in which Persephone is mentioned with most frequency is that of her kidnapping, bringing another layer into the essence of the character in question.

Moreover, some mentions of Persephone regard her as a minor goddess completely dependent on her mother, Demeter. Persephone’s connection to Demeter cannot be refuted, the mother-daughter dynamic within their relationship explains the recurrent mention of their names in conjunction. The Eleusinian mysteries were the most practised in antiquity, yet due to the secretive nature of the cult, there is no apparent evidence of the role that each of the goddesses played to the followers of such practice.

⁶⁸ Hes. Th.

⁶⁹ Hes. Th. 914

⁷⁰ Hes. Th. 914

The Eleusinian mysteries, devoted to the aforementioned goddesses, Demeter and her daughter Persephone, known by the locals as *Pherephatta* or *Kore*, the maiden,⁷¹ were a tradition attributed to Demeter herself. It is worth stating that the level of secrecy held by the members of this cult was quite unique; juxtaposing other pagan religious rites, the cult of Demeter and Persephone was one that could be described as originally being a family or perhaps a local cult limited to the members of the clan, with a strong traditional inclination towards the avoidance of the divulgence of the rites in question.⁷² As Burkert ruminates, '*these mysteries were organised by the polis of Athens and supervised by the archon basileus, the king*',⁷³ meaning that we can probably attribute the surviving fame of the mysteries to the literary prestige of Athens.⁷⁴

The importance of Eleusis as a location is that the place was seen as the refuge of the goddess Demeter, and for a short period of time, it is the place where Persephone returns to when she is not in the underworld. Eleusis is where the Athenians celebrated the *Mysteria*, otherwise known as the Autumn festival, a procession that started in Athens towards Eleusis and ended with a nocturnal celebration in the *Telesterion*, the Hall of Initiations. Here the gifts from the goddesses were to be revealed;⁷⁵ the first gift has a direct link to Demeter as it was grain, representing one of the bases of civilisation and the goddess domain; the second one was the mysteries, what

⁷¹ Burkert 1987:4-5.

⁷² Mylonas 1961:7

⁷³ Burkert 1987:5

⁷⁴ Burkert 1987:5

⁷⁵ Mylonas 1961:7, Burkert 1987:5

they signified were the faith that the practitioners had regarding the afterlife - the idea of 'better hopes' and a good afterlife were a promise that found origin in Persephone and what she, as queen of the realm of the dead embodied.⁷⁶ Initiation into a cult was a synonym to a change of status thus one could argue that the change could also occur in the afterlife, meaning that belonging to a cult could have been a way of ensuring a better status in the realm of the dead.⁷⁷

The mysteries provide us with a glimpse into the role of Persephone as queen of the underworld,⁷⁸ given that a hymn to Demeter reveals the nature of her connection to the cult and the extent of her power as a goddess:

*"[Zeus to Persephone]... you shall rule all that lives and moves and shall have the greatest rights among the deathless gods: those who defraud you and do not appease your power with offerings, reverently performing rites and paying fit gifts, shall be punished for evermore."*⁷⁹

Although the hymn is not directly connected to the Eleusinian mysteries, it could be argued that it marks a change in the view of the role that Persephone had to play. The purpose of the rituals performed in the cult of Demeter and Persephone,⁸⁰ and those related to burials and death, is to assure a 'blessed' status in the afterlife; the consequences of not performing the funerary rites can be seen through this hymn,⁸¹ in this context, Persephone is depicted as a punisher, as a deity that needs to be appeased instead of a

⁷⁶ Burkert 1987:5

⁷⁷ Burkert 1987:24

⁷⁸ Burkert 1987:24-25

⁷⁹ HH 2 365-369 in Burkert 1987.

⁸⁰ Burkert 1987:24

⁸¹ HH 2 365-369.

simple maiden known for frolicking in the flowers.⁸² Farnell, Guthrie and Mylonas reason that although Hades or Plouton was considered the lord of the netherworld, Persephone possessed a '*dominant power*' in the mysteries whilst her husband gave the appearance of a secondary role.⁸³

When it comes to cults and mysteries, myth needs to be accepted as a part of religion, as a fundamental part of its origin. Both Burkert and Nilsson agree on the interconnectedness of myth and religion when it comes to the cult of Demeter and Persephone,⁸⁴ conversely, so is the concept of grief and that of joy. The idea of the festival ending with acclamation and brandishing of torches⁸⁵ showcases a great deal of symbolism when examined alongside the image of Persephone as depicted in the literature. The act of mourning followed by that of celebration in the mysteries is meant to equate to the suffering of the goddess Demeter, her lamenting the loss of her daughter, whilst the joy and celebration found in the mysteries epitomise the return of Persephone.⁸⁶ The brandishing of torches is a symbol that can be examined as a representation of light, the return of light to the world of Demeter, the return of spring to the realm of the living, thus categorising Persephone as a figure of reincarnation.

Furthermore, Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* provides us with an example of mystery initiation, Burkert goes as far as labelling it '*the only first-person account of a mystery experience*' that has survived.⁸⁷ Although the passage

⁸² Hinds. 1987:3-27. Appollod. 3.6; Hes. Th. 918.

⁸³ Mylonas 1961:284, Farnell 1911, Guthrie 1935.

⁸⁴ Burkert 1987:73, Nilsson 1961:469.

⁸⁵ Lactantius Inst. Epit. 18 (23) 7, cf HN 275 f in Burkert 1987:75.

⁸⁶ Burkert 1987:5

⁸⁷ Burkert 1987:97

offers an insider's view to the initiation into the cult of Isis, the way in which Persephone, or in this case, Proserpina is referred to, highlights a different aspect to the understanding of the queen of the Greco-Roman Underworld.

*"So listen, and be sure to believe that what you hear is true. I drew near to the confines of death and trod the threshold of Proserpina, and before returning I journeyed throughout all the elements."*⁸⁸

It is worth mentioning that the interchangeable use of the name Persephone and Proserpina could be understood as the result of the transformation and evolution of Greek and Roman myth throughout the ages. Additionally, Apuleius is reflecting on an initiation process done to join the cult of Isis yet, the mention of Persephone suggests a deeper connection between these two characters, therefore a link between the two goddesses, Isis and Persephone can be established.⁸⁹ There is no doubt that Isis is an older goddess, associated with Egyptian mythology, however, through Apuleius' work, we can observe the assimilation of Isis into Greek mythology thus proving the flexibility of religion in antiquity.

The Metamorphoses of Apuleius is the sole Roman novel written in Latin that has been found to survive in its entirety. Written towards the end of the 2nd century CE, despite being a work of fiction, the novel showcases the experiences of Lucius, our main character, in a way that let its readers know about the culture, society and beliefs while not failing to provide amusement.⁹⁰ Although the last book, book 11, has a bigger focus on the experience of cult

⁸⁸ Apuleius Met. 11. 23. 31-34.

⁸⁹ Burkert 1987:27

⁹⁰ Walsh 1994 Introduction to Apuleius' Golden Ass.

initiation, something that the author himself is known for being part of,⁹¹ the last book is not, in any way, shape, or form an autobiography,⁹² however, it is still very much part of a novel. Having said this, Apuleius' work should not be discarded completely, the above quote proves to be an example of the uses of the name of the queen of the Greco-Roman underworld in regard to her darker nature, the one connected to the netherworld. The author pens the idea of crossing into the realm of the dead and returning to that of the living, as the act of stepping across '*the threshold of Proserpina*',⁹³ further equating the role of the goddess to that of a deity of rebirth. This in turn, fits the basic idea of an initiation ritual given that a voluntary death followed by a rebirth could be said to be part of the experience.⁹⁴

A look through the Orphic Lenses

Orphic theogonies are often compared to those of Hesiod, given that both provide their readers with a series of myths relating to the creation of the world and humankind, making them genealogical works.⁹⁵ However, Orphic theogonies are quite unique in the elements they possess. Bernabé summarises these characteristics in five different aspects,⁹⁶ the first one being the general idea of the re-creation of an intelligent cosmos, this could be interpreted from the notion of the universe being created from Chaos, and

⁹¹ Burkert 1987:26

⁹² Rutherford 2005:144-145.

⁹³ Apuleius Met. 11. 23. 31-34.

⁹⁴ Burkert 1987:99-100.

⁹⁵ Bernabé 2003:19

⁹⁶ Bernabé 2003:19-21.

Zeus ingesting the first demiurge so that he could birth the world in an organised and intellectual manner.⁹⁷ The second one refers to the idea that there was a primary germinal element, meaning that the universe was first an egg from which everything was created,⁹⁸ from this egg Eros was birthed, representing fertility and its origins. The third element is the one that we will be paying close attention to, here is where we encounter the concept of divine rulers and the addition to the divine line. A regime of gods and divine entities were responsible for the world, and all these entities were born from the union between Zeus and Persephone.⁹⁹ As Bernabé reflects, this notion holds intrinsic value since each of the gods presented a different method of government that implies a unique way of creating, establishing and developing relationships between gods and mortals.¹⁰⁰ The fourth characteristic that gives orphic theogonies their individuality, is the tendency to harmonise juxtaposing ideas of the gods, meaning that those characters that were once considered different deities found in Greek religion become one with different aspects and personalities.¹⁰¹

It is worth noting that this last element of orphic theogonies provides further explanation to the study of mythological characters. In the case of Persephone, in order to fully understand this particular Greco-Roman deity, it is necessary to do a study of as many representations of her and the different aspects or personalities that shape the concept of the queen of the Greco-

⁹⁷ Bernabé 2003:19

⁹⁸ Bernabé 2003:19-21, Mitchell 2015.

⁹⁹ Bernabé 2003:20

¹⁰⁰ Bernabé 2003:19-20.

¹⁰¹ Bernabé 2003:20-21.

Roman underworld. Moreover, Orphic theogonies present us with another element that one could say represents the purpose of the theogonies, Bernabé describes it as the fifth element,¹⁰² the innate link between anthropogony and theogony, the idea of the faith of men, dead or alive is dependent of the cosmos and its cycles, a concept further explored in Bernabés' research:

“La suerte de los hombres está ligada a la de los ciclos cósmicos, porque las almas también están sometidas a ciclos de purificación desde su disociación de la divinidad de su reintegración final.”¹⁰³

Further exploring the topic of Zeus and Persephone as the ones responsible for the ruling line of gods that are found in Greek mythology, based on Orphic tradition, Dionysus is portrayed as the heir to the throne of the gods.¹⁰⁴ Dionysus Zagreus was the offspring of the union between Zeus and Persephone, however he was mutilated by the Titans, perhaps as the result of the jealousy and rivalry between the Titans and the new generation of gods in power, or even as per Hera's instigation due to her own jealousy over the fact that the child was born to Zeus and a different woman. The Titans deceived the child, hacked him into pieces and proceeded to cook and devour him with the exception of his heart, which was saved by the goddess of wisdom, Athena.¹⁰⁵ The importance of this particular myth lies in what happened next - Dionysus Zagreus was reborn and the Titans were destroyed by Zeus.

¹⁰² Bernabé 2003:20

¹⁰³ Translates to: *The faith of men is connected to that of the cosmic cycles, given that the souls of the dead must also comply with the cycles of purification from the dissociation of their divinity to their final reintegration.* Bernabé 2003:20.

¹⁰⁴ Bernabé 2003:69-71.

¹⁰⁵ Bernabé 2003:69-70. Bernabé, Aesch. Fr. 228

Conversely, this myth is found in *Rhapsodic Theogony*,¹⁰⁶ which in turn provides an explanation for the creation of men, from the ashes of the slain Titans, human beings were made into being, meaning that mortals are made out two halves, one is that of the Titans and the second one comes from the part of Dionysus that the Titans ingested.¹⁰⁷ Based on this myth, human beings have a monstrous and divine side, the monstrous, dark or sinning side is attributed to the Titans, whilst our divine or godly side, which could be interpreted as a soul, comes from the chunks of Dionysus that the Titans ate. This is the part that wishes to reintegrate itself to its original divine nature, but this objective can only be accomplished once the soul has left its corporeal body and gone to the underworld, where it can rid itself of the titan qualities that it has absorbed during the period of time that it was held as one entity. It is in *Hades*,¹⁰⁸ where souls can endure a series of punishments and reincarnations that would eventually lead to the restoration of their divine status.¹⁰⁹

The death of Dionysus Zagreus can be found in three different versions in Orphic tradition, Bernabé ruminates that this first version of the myth, the one that has been discussed in the above paragraph, is the one that can be dated as the oldest. However, due to it being from as early as the 5th century BCE, we do not possess many details on the myth relating to the titanic and Dionysian involvement in the origins of men,¹¹⁰ meaning that much of our

¹⁰⁶ Cfr. Fr. 320. Bernabé 2003:70.

¹⁰⁷ Bernabé 2003:70.

¹⁰⁸ Another name for the Greek underworld.

¹⁰⁹ Bernabé 2003:70.

¹¹⁰ Bernabé 2003:71.

knowledge regarding this particular tale can be mostly attributed to philology work on the subject.

The aforementioned version of the creation of men parallels the explanation of human nature found in ancient Mesopotamian religion, as it was discussed in the first chapter whilst reflecting on the purpose of the *etemmu*,¹¹¹ the notion of human beings having two elements that make up a whole cannot be attributed solely to one culture. Both the first version of the Greek myth and the Mesopotamian one present humans as creatures made from the divine and something that can only be classified as other, a negative or polluted side. Furthermore, it is worth highlighting that whilst the version of Dionysus that the Orphic text makes reference to, proposes a portrait of a god that epitomises good, purity of soul, and overall divinity, later representations of Dionysus, depending on the literary evidence, could be seen as the reincarnation of Zagreus, describing a god that is associated with debauchery and overall bad behaviour.¹¹²

The second version of the origins of human life as seen in orphic texts corresponds to the Egyptian sacred tale of Osiris.¹¹³ The connection between Dionysus Zagreus and the Egyptian god Osiris is evident, given that the Egyptian myth credited to Orpheus tells the story of the death and reincarnation of the divine ruler of the Egyptian afterlife,¹¹⁴ who was killed and

¹¹¹ See Page 14. Burkert 1995

¹¹² March 2008

¹¹³ Bernabé 2003:71

¹¹⁴ Bernabé 2003:72

dismembered by his brother Seth in an act of jealousy and later brought back to life by his wife and sister Isis, with the help of other gods.¹¹⁵ Since the Egyptian culture is one that predates the Greek one, it is safe to assume that the Greeks, having learnt of the existence of the aforementioned tale, though of adopting it and making it their own by means of equating the god Dionysus Zagreus to the Egyptian Osiris.¹¹⁶ As Bernabé suggests, its relevance was not only important during early periods but also during that of Ptolemaic Egypt,¹¹⁷ since the cult of Dionysus was again practiced with much fervour due to the fact that the new rulers took the decision of re-establish it.¹¹⁸ It can be argued that the ruler who revived the cult of Dionysus Zagreus was Ptolemy II Philadelphus, based on the fact that doing so provided him with a way of joining both the Egyptian and Greek cultures, therefore, connecting with two different segments of his population whilst aiding him to achieve a level of stability in a new political environment.¹¹⁹ As was recently discussed, Dionysus and Osiris present unique similarities, which in turn explain why Ptolemy II Philadelphus would have chosen to identify with Dionysus Zagreus.¹²⁰

An extension of this version of the myth of the death and reincarnation of the god Dionysus can be found in the analysis of the portrayal of the god in Egypt. The election of Dionysus to represent Ptolemy II Philadelphus could be seen as a case of Hellenistic religious propaganda, as well as a way of

¹¹⁵ Diod. 3. 62. 6 in Bernabé 2003: 76.

¹¹⁶ Bernabé 2003:75-76.

¹¹⁷ Bernabé 2003: 76

¹¹⁸ Fraser 1972.

¹¹⁹ Goyette 2010:1-13.

¹²⁰ Goyette 2010:1-3.

strengthening the legitimacy of the Ptolemaic lineage,¹²¹ given that by associating with Dionysus, Philadelphus was also claiming to be a descendant of Alexander the Great.¹²² Although the god in question was recognised as emblematically important by both the Macedonian court and Alexander,¹²³ Ptolemy II Philadelphus was the first ruler to identify with Dionysus and to apply it to the governance of a multi-ethnic society.¹²⁴ Conversely, the depiction of Dionysus in Egypt is that of a snake deity,¹²⁵ further emphasising the syncretic yet dual characteristics of the uses of the god within Egyptian society, thus equating this deity to that found in the second version of the myth of Dionysus and the Titans attributed to Orpheus.¹²⁶

It should be stressed that the illustration of Dionysus in Ptolemaic Egypt corresponds to that of a snake-legged deity,¹²⁷ snakes were not a rarity in Egypt when it came to the presentation of gods.¹²⁸ In addition, snakes were often used in ancient literature for the presentation of creation narratives.¹²⁹ In accordance with Athenagoras' writings on the Orphic myth about Zagreus, dated between 176 and 180 CE, as discussed by Ogden,¹³⁰ Zeus-Sabazius pursued his own mother Rhea-Demeter. In order to evade his advances, she transformed herself into a *drakaina*,¹³¹ at which point Zeus-Sabazius

¹²¹ Goyette 2010:3-4.

¹²² Goyette 2010:3

¹²³ Goyette 2010

¹²⁴ Goyette 2010:3

¹²⁵ For more information on the depiction of gods as snakes in Egypt, see Pinch & Harris 2004

¹²⁶ Goyette 2010: 3-10, Bernabé 2003:75.

¹²⁷ For more information on the different imagery regarding Dionysus in Egypt, see Bailey 2007:263-270.

¹²⁸ Bailey 2007:269.

¹²⁹ Ogden 2013, Mitchell 2005:108, López-Ruiz 2010:1-5.

¹³⁰ Ogden 2013: 80-81.

¹³¹ A female serpent

transformed himself into a *drakōn*,¹³² and copulated with her in a ‘*knot of Heracles*’, a symbol that is represented in Hermes’ caduceus.¹³³ Persephone, being the fruit from that union, was then raped by Zeus-Sabazius also in *drakōn* form, siring Dionysus-Zagreus in the form of a bull.¹³⁴ Through these Orphic-styled accounts, an image of animalistic and sometimes even grotesque gods is painted, elements that can be observed in the description of Greek gods throughout the ages, given that they are considered anthropomorphic from Homeric accounts.¹³⁵

Moreover, a snake-legged Dionysus could be compared to the myth-like story of the origins of Alexander the Great, given that a particular tale has Zeus as his father, who is said to have visited Olympias in the form of a snake. The symbology of the snake in this story can be analogised with the Orphic account of Zeus appearing as a snake or *drakōn* and procreating with his daughter *Pherephatta*, yet another name for the goddess Persephone.¹³⁶

The versions of the tale of Dionysus Zagreus and the Titans that have been discussed so far correspond to fragments of theogonies characterised for having the same traditions as that of the *Derveni* and *Eudemus*.¹³⁷ The third version where part of the abovementioned myth is recounted is the one found in the *Rhapsodies*.¹³⁸ This so-called last version of the myth happens to be the one with the most importance within Orphic religion,¹³⁹ as it is in this

¹³² A male serpent

¹³³ For more information on the symbology of the caduceus.

¹³⁴ Ogden 2013:80

¹³⁵ Mitchell 2005

¹³⁶ Ogden 2013:80, Ogden 2013-Sourcebook: 38

¹³⁷ Bernabé 2007:99-133, Bernabé 2003.

¹³⁸ Bernabé 2003: 179.

¹³⁹ Bernabé 2003:178.

version where we find a more detailed account -if a fragmentary text can be called that-, of the union between Zeus and Persephone.

Based on the *Rhapsodic Theogony*, the episode that is described is that of the antecedents to the birth of Dionysus. A fragment states that Zeus, after killing his father Kronos, took his mother Rea,¹⁴⁰ and from that union Persephone was conceived.¹⁴¹ By transforming himself once again into a snake in order to unite himself to his own daughter,¹⁴² Zeus became '*the maker of prodigies*',¹⁴³ which in turn suggests that Zeus became the father of both gods and men.¹⁴⁴ It should be noted that the symbol of a snake also becomes relevant in terms of cult initiation, whilst the Eleusinian mysteries were associated with purity, there was also a cult to Zeus-Sabazius in existence that required the opposite, '*a metal snake was made to pass the initiand's clothes*' to symbolise a sexual union with the god which parallels both the myth regarding Zeus and Persephone's impregnation as well as that of Olympias by Zeus.¹⁴⁵

The makings of a Monster

Persephone is mostly known for her role as the goddess of spring, however, taking a deeper look into her character and the descriptions that we have of this goddess in Orphic texts, she appears as something other.¹⁴⁶ While this goddess' character could be labelled as dual prior to having analysed the

¹⁴⁰ Reference to Rea as Demeter

¹⁴¹ Fr. 276 in Bernabé 2003: 176.

¹⁴² On this case Persephone. See Fr. 280 in in Bernabé 2003: 177

¹⁴³ Bernabé 2003:177-8.

¹⁴⁴ Bernabé 2003:178, Ogden 2013:158.

¹⁴⁵ Burkert 1987:100, 106.

¹⁴⁶ Bernabé 2003:178

fragmentary Orphic literature, given that she presents us with a pure, somewhat virginal character that transforms after her abduction by the lord of the underworld into a being with more responsibilities and power,¹⁴⁷ taking a closer look at the depictions of Persephone that Orphic texts present us with, one could argue that what is described is, for lack of a better term, a monster.¹⁴⁸

A fragment found in the *Hieronyman and Hellanicus Theogony* portrays Persephone as a ‘*monstrous child*’, a creature with “...*two eyes upon two faces, with one face upon the back part of her throat, and she had horns,*”¹⁴⁹ or as a being that had “...*dos ojos en su sitio natural y dos más en la frente, y la cara de un animal por la parte de atrás de su cuello, y que tenía cuernos...*”¹⁵⁰ Although the image varies depending on the translation, this depiction of a monstrous Persephone is often associated with *Praxidike*, a deity or perhaps epithet of Persephone related to vengeance that is presented in a fragment from the *Orphic Argonautica*.¹⁵¹ Bernabé states that apart from this association, Persephone is also called ‘*Atela*’ in the *Rhapsodies*, a mystic name for a monstrous Persephone.¹⁵² This connection to *Praxidike* allows for a link to be established between Persephone and the *Erinyes*,¹⁵³ since both are related to the punishment of the souls of the departed, which further

¹⁴⁷ See chapter 1

¹⁴⁸ Defined as divine monsters - See Mitchell, 2005: 18, 281-285.

¹⁴⁹ Mitchell 2018, fr. 88 in Mitchell 2005:108.

¹⁵⁰ Translates to: *Two eyes in their natural place and two more in her forehead, and the face of an animal upon the back of her neck, and horned.* Fr. 88 in Bernabé 2003:105.

¹⁵¹ Orph. Arg. 31 in Bernabé 2003:176, Bernabé et al. 2008.

¹⁵² Bernabé 2003:176-177.

¹⁵³ Also known as the furies in Greek mythology. Virg. Aen. 6.250, Ov. Met. 4.453, Aesch. Eum. 321.

emphasises the label given to Persephone as the mother of the trio or the deity in charge of dispatching them from the underworld in search of those who are meant to be punished.¹⁵⁴

Among the most popularly practiced secret rites were the Orphic mysteries; Mylonas argues that the '*teletai*' can be attributed to Orpheus,¹⁵⁵ although these mysteries were better known later since the literature was made available during the Early Christian Era. Due to the nature of the cult and the ideal of attracting more people to join, the amalgamation of myths and practices from other popular cults was highly plausible, giving a credible explanation to the incorporation of the myth of the abduction of Persephone by Hades, which conflicted with the basic doctrine of Zagreus as the son of Persephone.¹⁵⁶

The image of a beastly Persephone can be further explored in Orphic texts. After Rea-Demeter gave birth to Persephone and saw the physical aspect of the child, she ran away and would not suckle the infant, which further explains the mystic name of '*Atela*', given that its meaning is "*the unsuckled one*".¹⁵⁷ Persephone is given her dominion by her mother, whilst Brisson argues it being over women,¹⁵⁸ it is not mentioned in any of the discovered fragments.¹⁵⁹ Additionally, it is prophesied that Apollo will join with

¹⁵⁴ Orph. Hymn. 29. 6, 6, 70. 3, Hom. Od. 10.494.

¹⁵⁵ Mylonas 1961:228.

¹⁵⁶ Mylonas 1961:228-229.

¹⁵⁷ Fr 88 in Bernabé 2003:105.

¹⁵⁸ Brisson 1995.

¹⁵⁹ Bernabé 2003:177.

Persephone and that, as a result of that union, '*splendid children with radiant fires in their faces*' will be born.¹⁶⁰ Another fragment reveals that instead Apollo took his own sister Artemis, tainting her in Delos next to the altar.¹⁶¹ The mention of Artemis' name notwithstanding, the fragment may be making reference to Persephone, given that as Bernabé ruminates, the two names are often confused between the Orphics.¹⁶²

The Veil of Persephone

The following chapter aims to present the reader with an evaluation of different mentions of Persephone which can be encountered throughout fragments that can be associated with Orpheus. The veil of Persephone is no other than the universe, the fabric of time in which the plane of earth and that of the sky with its constellations are represented.¹⁶³

The nature of the *Peplo* in this context becomes relevant due to the actions of Persephone. Based on the fragment from *Pherecydes*,¹⁶⁴ Persephone is sitting in the celestial kingdom weaving a *Peplo* and it is when she is embroidering a scorpion, '*the constellation of Scorpio found in winter*' that she is kidnapped by Hades to the netherworld.¹⁶⁵ Further mentions of

¹⁶⁰ Fr. 284 in Bernabé 2003:177-178.

¹⁶¹ Fr. 285 in Bernabé 2003:178.

¹⁶² Bernabé 2003:178-179.

¹⁶³ Bernabé 2003:178-182, Bernabé et al. 2008.

¹⁶⁴ Fr 68 col. I 13 ss. Schibili in Bernabé 2003:179.

¹⁶⁵ Bernabé 2003: 178-179.

these actions can be found in the golden Orphic tablets.¹⁶⁶ As Bernabé highlights, this event is extremely important in Orphic religion,¹⁶⁷ additionally, fragment 286 reveals Kore as the patron of everything that is planted, where she is represented weaving.¹⁶⁸ The second part of this fragment found in *Plato's Cratylus* showcases Kore and her entourage remaining in the world above weaving the living world.¹⁶⁹ It is worth noting that the representation of Persephone in relation to her weaving a veil is a theme that has not been greatly explored.¹⁷⁰ However, the image that is illustrated is one of a goddess with a high level of importance within the cosmos -she is not only seen as the queen of the underworld but as the entity responsible for the world of the living, giving her a crucial role in both planes.¹⁷¹ Moreover, the aforementioned topic of Persephone weaving the veil of the universe can be found in the work of the later Latin poet *Claudian*. The poet describes the goddess weaving an image of the cosmos just before she is abducted to the underworld,¹⁷² Ware argues that the passage reveals different roles for the two male gods, Pluto threatened chaos while Jupiter represents the effort to maintain stability.¹⁷³ The cosmic design that Persephone is creating could be understood as an echo of the author's view of the world, in turn, this could be interpreted as different from the overall concept of the universe.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁶ Bernabé & Jiménez San Cristóbal 2010.

¹⁶⁷ Bernabé 2003: 179.

¹⁶⁸ Fr 286 in Bernabé 2003: 179.

¹⁶⁹ Procl. In Plat. Cratyl. 19-22 in Fr. 284, Fr 286 in Bernabé 2003: 178-179, See Bernabé 2003: 179.

¹⁷⁰ Bernabé 2003: 180.

¹⁷¹ Bernabé 2003: 179-182.

¹⁷² Claud. Rapt. 1.246-276., Bernabé 2003: 179. Hinds 2012

¹⁷³ Claud. Rapt. 1.246-276, Ware 2012:37.

¹⁷⁴ Gruzelier 1993:143. Hinds 2012

Conversely, the interruption of her labour by Hades can be further explored in other fragments within the *Rhapsodies*.¹⁷⁵ Persephone is portrayed as more than just the mother of Dionysus Zagreus, who is said to be the last celestial ruler,¹⁷⁶ she represents the link between the world of the living, and that of the dead, which she goes back and forth from. Persephone returning from the underworld could be understood as the rebirth of the goddess, meaning that the deity in question could also be seen as a goddess of reincarnation.¹⁷⁷ On her visits to the underworld Persephone presides over the souls of the departed journeying between worlds, thus giving her a fundamental role in Orphic eschatology, as suggested by Bernabé.¹⁷⁸

Furthermore, there is a great emphasis placed on the differences between the *rape* and the *kidnapping* of Persephone.¹⁷⁹ In the *Orphic Rhapsodies*, we find fragments that depict Persephone weaving,¹⁸⁰ having said that, a distinction should be made between her raping and her abduction. Fragment 289 states that she was indeed raped by her father Zeus,¹⁸¹ and it is perhaps as a consequence of this act that she remained under the eye of her mother in the world above. Persephone was given access to inaccessible places, or hideaways, as if she was hidden from the universe itself.¹⁸² Whilst residing in the underworld with Hades, she governs over infernal creatures as the guardian of hideaways, and she is ostensibly able to reach the extremes

¹⁷⁵ Bernabé 2003: 179.

¹⁷⁶ Bernabé 2003: 178.

¹⁷⁷ Bernabé 2003:70.

¹⁷⁸ Bernabé 2003:178-179.

¹⁷⁹ Bernabé 2003:180.

¹⁸⁰ Bernabé 2003:178-183.

¹⁸¹ Fr. 289 in Bernabé 2003:180.

¹⁸² Fr. 288, Fr. 289 in Bernabé 2003:180.

of the universe as well as giving souls to shades and dead bodies.¹⁸³ It is worth highlighting that she does form a union with both Zeus and Hades.¹⁸⁴ In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*,¹⁸⁵ it is revealed that once Persephone lies with Hades the Eumenides are born,¹⁸⁶ further emphasising her role as the dispatcher of the Furies, as previously mentioned.¹⁸⁷ The Eumenides, in this case, are described in fragment 293 as '*nine daughters with shiny eyes, creators of flowers*'.¹⁸⁸ As commented by Bernabé, they are usually described as three entities instead of the nine mentioned here.¹⁸⁹ However, due to the lack of source material and context regarding the number of Eumenides in this light,¹⁹⁰ we can only ruminate as to the reasons behind the number given by the poet.¹⁹¹ This inconsistency in the number of beings can be understood as a mistranslation or misuse of a term and/or name by Orpheus, which can be further explored in the different lexes that he uses to address Persephone.¹⁹²

In terms of Persephone's portrayal as a weaver, Porphyry provides us with an explanation for the *Peplos*,¹⁹³ seeing as the loom can be interpreted as a symbol for rebirth.¹⁹⁴ The symbol of the universe presented in Porserpina's tapestry can be studied as a representation of harmony and its

¹⁸³ Bernabé 2003:180-181.

¹⁸⁴ Bernabé 2003:181-182.

¹⁸⁵ HH 2, Bernabé 2003:181.

¹⁸⁶ Chthonic goddesses of vengeance. See Bernabé 2003:181-182.

¹⁸⁷ See page 12. Hom. Od. 10.494.

¹⁸⁸ Fr. 293 in Bernabé 2003:181.

¹⁸⁹ Bernabé 2003:180.

¹⁹⁰ Fr. 293 in Bernabé 2003:180.

¹⁹¹ Bernabé 2003:180.

¹⁹² *Monogenes*, *Kore*, *Atela*, etc., are used throughout Orphic texts in reference to Persephone. See Bernabé 2003:172-783.

¹⁹³ Porphyry. De antro nymph. 14 p. 56, 10 Simonini in Fr. 286 in Bernabé 2003:173

¹⁹⁴ Rigoglioso 2010:100-110.

counterpart, giving the goddess yet another role, a ‘*custodial* and *cosmogonical*’ one.¹⁹⁵ Based on the passage found in *Claudian’s Rapt.* - Persephone’s role in the universe proves to be even more significant,¹⁹⁶ she was involved in both its creation and in the dissipation of the initial chaos. Therefore, Persephone can be seen as the deity who, alongside Zeus, brought order to the world and thus, light to the darkness.¹⁹⁷

Rigoglioso states that there seems to be an ancient connection between weaving and incarnation,¹⁹⁸ meaning that Persephone could have had the ability to recreate herself in terms of a new generation.¹⁹⁹ Claudian’s view on the *Peplos* makes it seem as if Persephone is weaving a robe for her mother Demeter,²⁰⁰ however, depending on the fragment, the labour of Persephone could be interpreted as either her doing something for her mother or her preparing for her own wedding.²⁰¹ Adding to this notion fragments 279 and 285 in the *Rhapsodic Theogony* mention a prediction of a union between Persephone and Apollo,²⁰² which could provide us with an explanation as to why she is weaving her own wedding veil. On the other hand, the previously discussed prediction also mentions the creation of children with ‘shiny faces’, which later in fragment 292 are referred to as the offspring of the union between Persephone and Hades,²⁰³ not between the goddess in question and

¹⁹⁵ Coombe 2018:71-91. Wheeler 1999:203, Hinds 2012:222-3.

¹⁹⁶ Claudian *Rapt.* 1.246-276. See chapter 2 in Coombe 2018.

¹⁹⁷ Coombe 2018:77.

¹⁹⁸ See Chapter 5 in Rigoglioso 2010.

¹⁹⁹ Rigoglioso 2010:109, Bernabé 2003:175.

²⁰⁰ Bernabé 2003:178-179. Claudian 1. 246 ff in Rigoglioso 2010:109.

²⁰¹ Rigoglioso 2010:109, Fr. 286, 287, 288, 289, 290 in Bernabé 2003:179-180.

²⁰² See Bernabé 2003:177.

²⁰³ Fr. 285, in Bernabé 2003:176, Fr. 292 in Bernabé 2003: 181.

Apollo, therefore, proving all these fragments invalidate each other, or are a clear example of how little evidence has survived the preceding millennia.

Persephone's connection to weaving places her firmly in a different position in terms of her status within the Greek pantheon.²⁰⁴ Moreover, the connotations of her being a virgin prior to her abduction by Hades could be acknowledged as a direct consequence of her being associated with weaving,²⁰⁵ signifying that the idea of Persephone as a maiden goddess suggests that her being the mother of Dionysus Zagreus is a result of divine birth,²⁰⁶ as suggested by Rigoglioso, Persephone could also be considered to be a '*nymph*' since the term was frequently used as a title for '*priestesses of miraculous conception*',²⁰⁷ thus providing Persephone with a different image. Although this particular representation of Persephone would fit within the Eleusinian mysteries,²⁰⁸ since purity was one of the key themes within this cult,²⁰⁹ it does not explain the many references made to her rape by Zeus-Sabazius.²¹⁰

On the subject of Persephone being the mother of Dionysus,²¹¹ as it was discussed in a previous chapter, Dionysus Zagreus was killed by the Titans to be later reborn,²¹² thus showcasing hidden meaning in regard to the

²⁰⁴ Rigoglioso 2010:109.

²⁰⁵ Rigoglioso 2010:108-110.

²⁰⁶ Rigoglioso 2010:109.

²⁰⁷ Rigoglioso 2010:109.

²⁰⁸ Rigoglioso 2010:108-110, Burkert 1987, Mylonas 1961:7.

²⁰⁹ Burkert 1987:100, 106.

²¹⁰ Fr. 280, 281, 282, 283 in Bernabé 2003:177-179.

²¹¹ Bernabé 2003: 178.

²¹² Bernabé 2003:69-70. Bernabé, Aesch. Fr. 228.

notion of rebirth.²¹³ In this way, Dionysus exists once again;²¹⁴ in one account Zeus places the heart of the dead Dionysus in a statue,²¹⁵ which happens to be the same material that the Titans used to cover their faces in order to trick the young god. However, another Orphic legend details the rebirth, or perhaps reincarnation, of Dionysus as being the offspring of a mortal woman, Semele, and Zeus. Although this version of the myth is seen as the most commonly known, the *Rhapsodies* show certain elements that suggest otherwise, as suggested by Bernabé, that the gestation of Dionysus within Semele happened after perhaps consuming a potion.²¹⁶ As a result of Hera's meddling, Semele was not able to carry Dionysus to full term,²¹⁷ which in turn, led to Zeus carrying Dionysus for the rest of the pregnancy.²¹⁸ It could be argued that Dionysus has three different births: the first from Persephone, the second from Semele, and the third from the thigh of Zeus.²¹⁹ This idea further associates Dionysus with Persephone, since both deities can be seen as exemplars of reincarnation and rebirth, Persephone, as the weaver of the *Peplos*,²²⁰ symbolises the goddess holding the universe in her hands, which can be further analysed as Persephone overseeing the passage of time for gods and mortals alike. During the time she resides above ground she is depicted as continuing her labour,²²¹ meaning that her dominion covers anything that grows. This can be understood as both plants, as she is often

²¹³ Fr. 318 in Bernabé 2003:193.

²¹⁴ See Bernabé 2003:193.

²¹⁵ Fr. 325, Iul. Firm. Mat. De err. 6, 4 (89 Turcan) in Bernabé 2013:195.

²¹⁶ See Bernabé 1989.

²¹⁷ Bremmer 2010, See Bernabé 2013:196-197.

²¹⁸ Fr. 327 in See Bernabé

²¹⁹ See Bernabé 2013:198.

²²⁰ Bernabé 2013: 178-191.

²²¹ Bernabé 2013: 178-190.

linked with spring thus fertility,²²² and mortals, who depending on the source, she is seen as the creator of.²²³ On the other hand, while she resides in the underworld, she is seen as presiding over the dead, being in charge of punishing the souls who are sentenced to eternal torment and/or sending the Furies, who could or could not be her and Hades' daughters, conveying the notion of her dominion being extended to also cover those who do not possess life. Therefore, Persephone can be seen as having dominion over all that is living, and all that is dead.

Further to the concept of her creation of the *Peplos*, having explored the idea that every time Persephone enters or leaves the underworld can be viewed as a rebirth of the goddess, it is possible to view this as also being a point at which her virginity is restored. As the notion of her return to the weaving of her veil stresses the connection between weaving and the ideals of purity and virginity, there is a clear image created that implies that the goddess' virginity is restored with each rebirth. As such, her



Figure 1 - Abduction of Persephone.

connection to the Eleusinian mysteries and the worship of Hera under the

²²² Hinds 1987; Apollod. 1.5; Ov. Met. 5.552-615.

²²³ Pseudo-Hygin. Fab 220 in Smith and Trzaskoma 2007.

name of Kore, which literally has the meaning of “the maiden”, and her mother Demeter reveals the idea of Persephone only existing in the underworld within this context. In addition, it further emphasises her connection to immortality, given that the return of Persephone to the world of the living, and her abduction to the netherworld, were used in antiquity as popular pieces of funerary art,²²⁴ as can be observed in figure 1, an image depicting the abduction of Kore by Pluto, dated to the 4th century BCE found in the tomb of Persephone in Vergina.²²⁵

In short, whilst she is above ground and being worshipped as Kore,²²⁶ the deity possesses one character that is associated with spring and the growth of plants: that of rebirth. Yet, when she is in the netherworld, her character of Persephone is reassumed. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the view of Persephone within this dual persona does not encompass all the facets of the goddess being studied. Furthermore, the monstrous-looking illustration of Persephone can be interpreted as yet a different aspect of her characterisation that could prove to be a different feature of the goddess undergoing a journey, which can be seen as a cycle she undergoes whilst travelling back and forth to the underworld.

A further connection can be established between Persephone, the veil she is weaving, and Dionysus.²²⁷ The veil itself can be examined as a symbol

²²⁴ Corbelli 2006

²²⁵ Figure 1. Frescoes 15 in Macedonian Heritage.

²²⁶ Leeming 2005.

²²⁷ Bernebé 2013: 178-190.

of rebirth, it being the constant feature of Persephone within her maiden persona.²²⁸ As a result of this, her portrayal with a snake,²²⁹ which is a symbol often associated with creation narratives,²³⁰ can be seen to further emphasise the notion of creation, which in turn forges a more direct link between Dionysus Zagreus being shown as a snake deity in Egypt.²³¹ This link is greatly strengthened by the fact that Dionysus is said to have married Ariadne, who was also a weaver,²³² demonstrating that there is an evident link with Dionysus and weaving, indirectly demonstrating his ties to Persephone in more way than one.

The Creator of mankind

Prometheus is usually portrayed as the creator of man,²³³ however, one ancient source reveals Persephone as the one who is actually responsible for this act.²³⁴ Pseudo-Hyginus, a Roman source attributed to the c. 2nd century CE,²³⁵ showcases a myth that shows Persephone as having a role in the creation of mankind.²³⁶ Based on this source, Kore is seen as the one moulding a figure of a man from clay, and asking Zeus to give the figure life,²³⁷ which he agreed to do with the condition that this new creation was named

²²⁸ Fr. 286, 288, 290 in Bernebé 2013: 178-180.

²²⁹ Ogden 2013.

²³⁰ Mitchell 2005.

²³¹ Bailey 2007:269, Pinch & Harris 2004.

²³² Pinch & Harris 2004.

²³³ Ov. Met. i. 81, Apollod. i. 7.

²³⁴ Pseudo-Hygin. Fab 220 in Smith and Trzaskoma 2007.

²³⁵ Smith and Trzaskoma 2007. See chapter 4 in López-Ruiz 2010.

²³⁶ Smith and Trzaskoma 2007:165-166.

²³⁷ López-Ruiz 2010: 130-137.

after himself.²³⁸ Gaia is also mentioned in this story, she is described as rising from the earth to demand that since the being was created from the earth itself which arguably is her own body,²³⁹ it should receive her name. Moreover, Kronos also makes an appearance in this story since he is portrayed as the judge that the divine beings choose to clear the dispute.²⁴⁰ The result of the argument can be summarised as Kronos giving each of the deities a role in the life of this new creation. Since Zeus was responsible for giving the being life, it could be assumed that he was given control over the fate of the creation.²⁴¹ Persephone was to act as a *psychopomp*,²⁴² the deity who was to receive him after death, since she was the one that shaped its essence and gave it a form before it was animated into a living being.²⁴³ As such, once the creature has finished its cycle of life, its body is to return to Persephone in the land of the dead. Having said this, Gaia is the one who owns him while he walks the earth, meaning that as long as he is alive, she has ownership over him. In terms of its name, the fragment reveals the name of the creature to be ‘*man*’;²⁴⁴ given that he is made from clay, meaning he comes from the earth, the creature is named after the latin word for soil/earth, which is ‘*Humus*’, leading to ‘*homo*’.²⁴⁵

²³⁸ Smith and Trzaskoma 2007:48.

²³⁹ Fb 220 in Smith and Trzaskoma 2007:48-49.

²⁴⁰ Smith and Trzaskoma 2007:48.

²⁴¹ Pseudo-Hygin. Fab 220 in Smith and Trzaskoma 2007.

²⁴² A term used in Greek mythology to describe a guide for the souls to the underworld. Nagy 1990:112.

²⁴³ Fab 220 in Smith and Trzaskoma 2007.

²⁴⁴ Pseudo-Hygin. Fab 220 in Smith and Trzaskoma 2007

²⁴⁵ Pseudo-Hygin. Fab 220 in Smith and Trzaskoma 2007:48-50.

It could be argued that the above summary of the one mention of Persephone as the creator of mankind, portrays the goddess as a key player in regard to the existence of man. The queen of the underworld not only has access to the human body once he has finished his existence in the realm of the living, but it is also revealed that the goddess is relevant to mankind before life is given to the body.²⁴⁶ This however, is only an interpretation of her connection to man whilst she is in the underworld acting as its queen, ignoring the arguable six months in which she dwells in the world above.²⁴⁷ During these months, Persephone has another connection to mankind, that being her role as the physical entity that represents spring bounty, and the fertility of the land, meaning that she is essential to the life of man during his life, as without her, there would be no spring or any notion of the fertility of the earth, and thus no creation of life itself.²⁴⁸

The notions of life, death, and rebirth have a connection to humankind through the dominions over life that Persephone is seen to hold.²⁴⁹ As has been previously discussed, the cycles of life and death are easily linked through the idea that Persephone resides both in the world of the living and in the netherworld,²⁵⁰ which can be understood as her having a level of influence over humankind at all stages of its life.

In addition to this, the concept of rebirth, as discussed in the previous chapter,²⁵¹ is also linked to the goddess in question, given that she is portrayed

²⁴⁶ Smith and Trzaskoma 2007.

²⁴⁷ Hinds 1987; Apollod. 1.5; Ov. Met. 5.552-615.

²⁴⁸ Burkert 1995:66

²⁴⁹ Brisson 1995.

²⁵⁰ Bernabé 2003:178-179.

²⁵¹ Burkert 1987:99-100.

in early literature as a deity that represents the concept of the cyclical nature of life.²⁵² This can be further examined in the studies of the mysteries of Eleusis,²⁵³ given that the cult perceives Persephone as a goddess that is reborn when she journeys from the underworld to the world above,²⁵⁴ that is to say, every time she restarts her cycle of life and is reborn. Furthermore, another connection can be made to the ideas of rebirth and the underworld through the myths found in Mesopotamian culture, the first chapter explored the *Descent of Inana*,²⁵⁵ with the goddess having gone through the seven different gates found in the Mesopotamian underworld,²⁵⁶ which can be interpreted as the divestment and loss of certain earthly elements to the goddess' character. Nevertheless, when she returns to the land of the living, her ascent is conveyed as a rebirth due to the fact that she died whilst she was in the presence of Ereshkigal,²⁵⁷ otherwise known as the *queen of the night*.²⁵⁸

Psychopomp and Circumstance

In terms of Persephone being considered a *psychopomp*,²⁵⁹ this association further emphasises the magnitude of her dominion over mankind.²⁶⁰ Once the life cycle of a human being has been completed, Persephone, as the queen of the Underworld, is the deity meant to receive

²⁵² Fr. 318 in Bernabé 2003:193.

²⁵³ Burkert 1987, Mylonas 1961:7.

²⁵⁴ Mylonas 1961:286.

²⁵⁵ Dalley 2008, The ETCSL project: 2006.

²⁵⁶ Black and Green 1992, Dalley 2008, Burkert 1995.

²⁵⁷ Bertman 2005, Kramer 1971, Leick 2010.

²⁵⁸ Heffron 2016, Mark 2017.

²⁵⁹ Nagy 1990:112.

²⁶⁰ Bernabé 2013: 178-190.

them in the afterlife.²⁶¹ Moreover, after the death of the physical body, which it could be argued that Persephone has no claim over as Zeus '*gave life to Persephone's creation*' thus giving him dominion over the fates and lives of humans,²⁶² souls are portrayed as subjects of the realm of the dead, meaning that they are subjects to its queen, Persephone.²⁶³ This notion reveals different aspects to Persephone's dominion, showcasing her hold over humanity.

Further exploring what was discussed in chapter 3 regarding mortal beings being made from two different elements (Dionysus and the Titans),²⁶⁴ once the life cycle of a human being has ended their mortal souls are condemned to wander from one body to the next, doomed to suffer one torment after another. It is not until they can obtain the forgiveness of Dionysus that they are able to rest in the underworld. Reincarnation is a key theme in Orphic religion, this concept of transmigration can be further explored in Plato's '*Myth of Er*'. Based on *Plato's Gorg.* 524,²⁶⁵ those who have been judged in the underworld can either go to the Isles of the Blessed or Tartarus.²⁶⁶ Conversely, in the *Myth of Er*, which can be found in the last chapters of the *Republic*,²⁶⁷ it is revealed that souls entered a wonderland that is described as being full of holes in the earth, placed one in front of another, and that the sky was also full of holes.²⁶⁸ In between these holes, the judges

²⁶¹ Fb 220 in Smith and Trzaskoma 2007:48-49.

²⁶² Fb 220 in Smith and Trzaskoma 2007:48-49.

²⁶³ Fb 220 in Smith and Trzaskoma 2007:48-49.

²⁶⁴ Cfr. Fr. 320. Bernabé 2003:70.

²⁶⁵ Fr. 460 in Bernabé 2003:251.

²⁶⁶ Bernabé 2003:250-252.

²⁶⁷ Plat. Rep. 10.614-621.

²⁶⁸ Plat. Rep. 10.614b, Fr. 461 in Bernabé 2003:251-252.

of the dead were seated and, after pronouncing the sentence of the deceased, they would order which way the soul would go.²⁶⁹ The souls who were found ‘just’ would follow the path on the right, which led through the sky, and those found lacking would take the path on the left hand of the judges, leading downwards.²⁷⁰ From this, it could be assumed that the path on the left hand of the judges led to Tartarus, and thus eternal suffering. Before the analysis continues, it should be stated that the aforementioned fragment is, indeed, fragmentary, and thus is not complete. When discussing the paths a soul can take after being judged, it is not revealed as to whether going through the sky will lead the soul back to the land of the living, and thus to a reincarnation. Going through the sky could also be interpreted as the soul, having already been through the process of reincarnation, is then being led to the Isles of the Blessed or to Elysium. This can be seen in the following fragmentary quote:²⁷¹

*...” Entre estos huecos se sentaban los jueces que, tras haber anunciado su sentencia, ordenaban al justo que tomaran el camino de la derecha y hacia arriba, a través del cielo [...] y a los injustos, el de la izquierda hacia abajo.”*²⁷²

Moreover, the migration of souls can be seen as the continuation of the faith of human beings.²⁷³ Some of the fragments in the *Rhapsodies* provide us with an insight on the topic of the migration of souls;²⁷⁴ Fragment 337

²⁶⁹ Fr. 461 in Bernabé 2003:252.

²⁷⁰ Plat. Rep. 10.614b, Fr. 461 in Bernabé 2003:251-252.

²⁷¹ Bernabé 2003:251-252.

²⁷² Plat. Resp. 614b. Translates to: ...*The judges (of the underworld) were seated between these holes, and after having pronounce their sentence, would order the just to take the path on the right and up through the sky [...] and that the unjust, take that on the left leading downwards.* in Bernabé 2003:252.

²⁷³ Bernabé 2003:203.

²⁷⁴ Cfr. Hes. Th 26 ss, Hymn. Cer 256 s., Aristoph. Aves 685 ss., etc. in Bernabé 2003:203.

showcases the human condition as shameful, and humans are portrayed as ignorant and foolish.²⁷⁵ This fragment also portrays the degenerate race of mortals alongside beasts and birds, with all of these being described as lacking the foresight to avoid disgrace.²⁷⁶ Additionally, the poem also refers to the topic of transmigration after the discussion of the myth of the Titans being punished, and mortals being born from their ashes.²⁷⁷ Since the souls are set to change lives through the process of rebirth,²⁷⁸ this means that their souls could reside in the bodies of human beings and animals alike,²⁷⁹ thus suggesting that all beings have souls. Although this passage suggests that all beings have a soul, it is worth highlighting that, due to it being in Plato's *Republic*,²⁸⁰ it is more a philosophical discussion than a religious idea.

Another fragment proves winged beasts and birds to be the ones who carry the souls to the House of Hades.²⁸¹ It is also said, however, that nothing carries the souls of the winged creatures to the underworld,²⁸² implying that birds do not have a soul and are instead left to fly endlessly. They are said to do this until they, along with the destroying forces of the wind, take control of another being.²⁸³

Hermes is also mentioned as a *psychopomp*,²⁸⁴ since the mortal souls of the deceased are taken to Hades and Persephone by the god. Persephone

²⁷⁵ Fr. 337 in Bernabé 2003:204.

²⁷⁶ Bernabé 2003:203-205. Fr. 337 in Bernabé 2003:204.

²⁷⁷ Bernabé 2003:203, Cfr. Fr. 320. in Bernabé 2003:70.

²⁷⁸ Bernabé 2003:204.

²⁷⁹ Fr. 339 in Bernabé 2003:205.

²⁸⁰ Fr. 338: Procl. In Plat. Rep. II 338 in Bernabé 2003:204

²⁸¹ Fr. 339 in Bernabé 2003:205.

²⁸² Fr. 339, 340 in Bernabé 2003:205.

²⁸³ Fr. 339 in Bernabé 2003:205.

²⁸⁴ Bernabé 2003:205-210.

is shown as the deity responsible for accepting the payment from souls before their final reincarnation,²⁸⁵ it is implied that, once the souls have reached the highest level of purification and have had the Titan component to their soul removed, Dionysus has been freed from them. It is said that she is the goddess responsible for collecting punishment as payment from them as recompense for the suffering she went through when Dionysus was killed by the Titans.²⁸⁶ When these souls are then reincarnated, Persephone allows them to reach a high social standing in order for them to achieve the greatest possible place in the underworld,²⁸⁷ thus having a good destiny in the netherworld and a form of positive rebirth in Hades, as they gain a place at the perpetual banquet.²⁸⁸ What can be summarised from this description is that Persephone is the one who has the power of liberating certain souls. This is relevant as Pindar's mention of the freeing of certain souls by Persephone,²⁸⁹ shows the theory of transmigration in a different source whilst making a reference to a different aspect of Persephone's character: that in which she is portrayed as the mother of Dionysus Zagreus.²⁹⁰ It also reveals that, even after being taken to the underworld and placed under a type of house arrest for half of the year and going through rebirth every time she journeys from the underworld to the land of the living, there is still a mention of her mourning her son, the first incarnation of Dionysus.²⁹¹ Conversely, Pindar emphasises the moment in which the souls obtain pardon from the infernal goddess and, this can be understood as her

²⁸⁵ Fr. 348 in Bernabé 2003:209.

²⁸⁶ Fr. 348 in Bernabé 2003:209-210.

²⁸⁷ Bernabé 2003:209.

²⁸⁸ Fr 348-349 in Bernabé 2003:209-210.

²⁸⁹ Bernabé 2003:209, Pind. Fr. 443 in Bernabé 2003:244.

²⁹⁰ Bernabé 2003:209

²⁹¹ Bernabé 2003:243-244.

being responsible for making men heroes in the afterlife and as the deity who can grant access to Elysium.²⁹²

Furthermore, the *Orphic Golden Tablets* which are dated between 400 BCE and 260 CE,²⁹³ and are often found in tombs, prove to be a series of instructions for the soul on what to do upon reaching the underworld, making them a relevant source for the study of Persephone, given that she is the queen of this realm.²⁹⁴ As demonstrated by Bernabé,²⁹⁵ tablets from Hiponio (fragment 474) and Entella (fragment 475) present us with texts of a character communicating with the dead to describe the places and the journey that he must face whilst in the underworld, providing him with a list of what he must and must not do to reach a destination that is considered to be better than the common field where the rest of the deceased reside.²⁹⁶ The first thing fragment 474 mentions is the act of dying and the period of transition between life and death.²⁹⁷ Bernabé emphasises that *‘to die’* cannot be seen as a static verb, but due to the way of its construction, it is one that includes movement, thus its meaning should be understood as a transition, which highlights the notion of *‘dying’* as a journey to a different realm.²⁹⁸

²⁹² Fr. 443 in Bernabé 2003: 244-245.

²⁹³ Bernabé 2003:253-276. Bernabé & Jiménez San Cristóbal 2010.

²⁹⁴ Bernabé 2003:253.

²⁹⁵ Bernabé 2003:253-254.

²⁹⁶ Bernabé 2003:256.

²⁹⁷ Fr. 474 in Bernabé 2003:256.

²⁹⁸ Ft 300 in Bernabé 2003:256.

Given that we have established that dying is a transitional process, the notion of entering the underworld can be studied as a liminal one.²⁹⁹ It also mentions Persephone, not by name but by her title as the queen of the realm below.³⁰⁰ She is again presented as the deity who is in charge of deciding if a dead person can advance or move onto Elysium.³⁰¹ The instructions that are given state that, once the queen has approved their entry, the dead are to drink from the lagoon of the goddess of memory, and once they have done so, they too can follow the sacred road which is mentioned as being the same one that the rest of those initiated take to Elysium or the Isles of the Blessed.³⁰² Judging by the way in which those who are initiated are mentioned in this fragment, one could argue that those 'initiated' are those who took the rites of the Eleusinian mysteries.³⁰³

Fragment 475 is in worse condition and is even more fragmentary than fragment 474,³⁰⁴ however it has been partially reconstructed through its combination with three other tablets.³⁰⁵ What this fragment exposes, reinforces what was mentioned on Hiponio's fragmentary tablet;³⁰⁶ again, the dying process is mentioned as being the first stage of death, however, there is also a mention to the hero remembering '*something*'.³⁰⁷ Bernabé suggests that this expression of remembrance seems to allude to the need to

²⁹⁹ See Turner 1995:237, Gennep 1960.

³⁰⁰ Fr. 474 in Bernabé 2003:256-527.

³⁰¹ Bernabé 2003: 256-258.

³⁰² Fr. 443 in Bernabé 2003: 244-245.

³⁰³ Burkert 1987:99-100.

³⁰⁴ Bernabé 2003: 257-258.

³⁰⁵ See Bernabé 2003: 257.

³⁰⁶ Fr. 474 in Bernabé 2003: 2576-257.

³⁰⁷ Missing words. See Fr. 475 in Bernabé 2003: 257.

remember,³⁰⁸ which could imply that the initiation rites and rituals relate to either the mysteries or the burial rites that must be done in order to obtain the label of 'hero',³⁰⁹ and thus reach the desired field of the underworld. There is a mention to drinking from the lagoon of Mnemosyne,³¹⁰ which is protected by guardians, who are said to be the ones who question the soul of the departed as to why they are in Hades' realm.³¹¹ They then consult with the queen of the underworld and, depending on her answer, will allow the deceased to drink from the lagoon that they guard.³¹² This fragment also portrays Persephone as the deity with the power to decide where a soul will eventually spend eternity.³¹³ Interestingly, there is a mention of passwords, which Bernabé ruminates, given the last letter of the fragment, could be the first letter of the name Persephone.³¹⁴ That being the case, and if the tablet begins in the same way as the other tablet (fragment 474),³¹⁵ means that the episode should end with the mention of the soul being in the presence of the queen pronouncing the passwords to her,³¹⁶ because entry to Elysium is limited.

The tablet in the following image demonstrates the state of the tablets, as it was mentioned by Bernabé that they were found in tombs.³¹⁷ The tablet found in Petelia proves to be from the 3rd to 2nd century BCE,³¹⁸ and what this

³⁰⁸ Bernabé 2003: 257.

³⁰⁹ Bernabé 2003: 257-260.

³¹⁰ Greek deity associated with memories and remembrance. Bernabé 2003: 256-276.

³¹¹ Fr. 474, 475 in Bernabé 2003: 256-258.

³¹² Fr. 475 in Bernabé 2003: 256-258.

³¹³ Bernabé 2003: 257.

³¹⁴ Fr. 475. In Bernabé 2003: 258.

³¹⁵ Fr. 474, 475 in Bernabé 2003: 256-258.

³¹⁶ Fr. 475 in Bernabé 2003: 257.

³¹⁷ Fr. 476 in in Bernabé 2003: 258-259.

³¹⁸ Figure 2. 1843,0724.3 in The British Museum

image proves is how deteriorated and fragmentary the texts in these tablets are, making the task of deciphering and interpreting what was written extremely difficult.

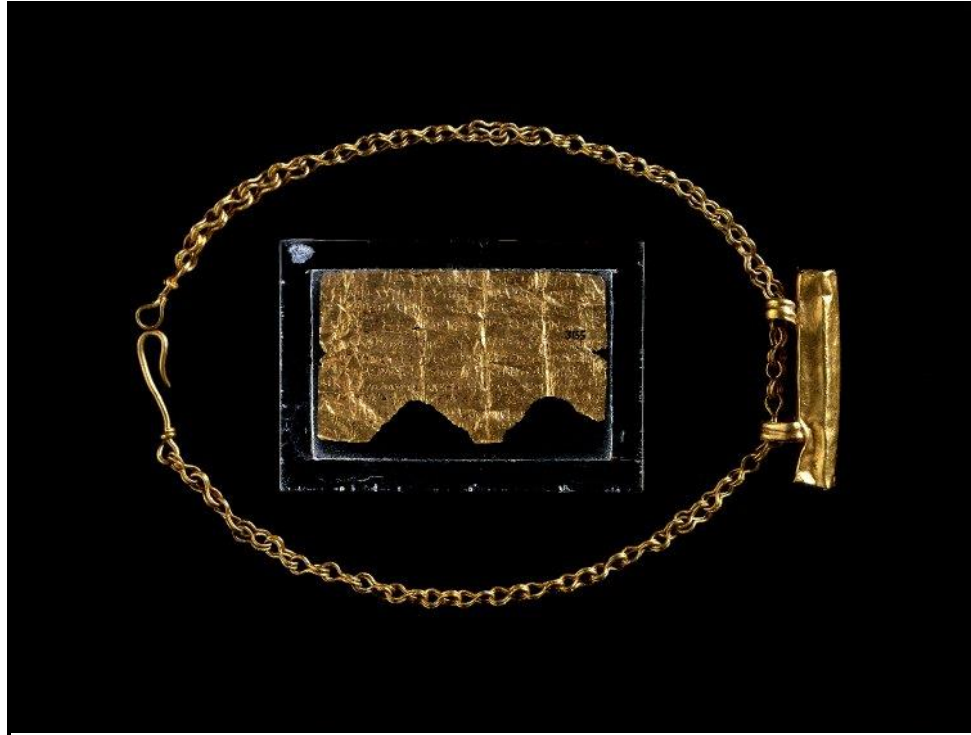


Figure 2: Orphic tablet and pendant found at Petelia.

Moreover, a link could be established between the *Orphic Golden Tablets* and Homeric tradition,³¹⁹ given that the souls that enter Hades as discussed in the *Odyssey* seem to have forgotten their prior existence, meaning their lives on earth, and thus are left to wander the banks of one of the rivers in the underworld, without any recollection or memories, due to not having received the proper burial rites.³²⁰ Although in Orphic texts, only the person who drinks the water from the *River Lethe* is the one who forgets the initiation,³²¹ thus forgetting their memories of the world and they must then be

³¹⁹ Bernabé 2003: 260.

³²⁰ Od. 10.521, Bernabé 2003: 260-262.

³²¹ Od. 10.521, Leeming 2005, Mackie 1999:485-50. See Rudhardt 1971.

reincarnated to the world above and go through the life cycle again and perform the proper rites. As Bernabé points out, this image portrayed in Orphic religion coincides with Platonic philosophy. One could argue that the water from the river of forgetfulness is a symbol of rebirth, given that drinking the waters from this river will lead to the deceased returning to the land of the living.³²² However, being above ground once again is not seen in a positive light but is considered as a *true exile of the soul*.³²³ In addition, another connection can be made between Orphic religion and the Egyptian belief in the afterlife since the '*Book of the Dead*',³²⁴ as discussed by Bernabé,³²⁵ has the potential of being a model that helps to shape the Orphic description of the instructions given to the soul in the netherworld.³²⁶ This being said, although there are many mentions to the Egyptian dead seeking water,³²⁷ due to the belief that without the appropriate offerings they would suffer from hunger and thirst,³²⁸ there are no references to the need to remember, as there are in the Orphic equivalent.³²⁹

Exploring the idea of passwords being required at the moment of judgement by the queen of the underworld,³³⁰ the Orphic tablet found in Hiponio clearly states that the guardians of the lagoon are not the ones who

³²² Rudhardt 1971, Bernabé 2003: 262.

³²³ Bernabé 2003: 262.

³²⁴ Budge 1967, Champdor 1966.

³²⁵ Bernabé 2003: 262-263.

³²⁶ Bernabé 2003: 263.

³²⁷ See Rudhardt 1971 for an overview on the importance of water in Greek mythology.

³²⁸ Bernabé 2003: 263.

³²⁹ Bernabé 2003: 263.

³³⁰ Fr. 474, 475, 476 & 477 in Bernabé 2003: 256-259.

get to make the ultimate decision,³³¹ as this responsibility or role lies with Persephone.³³² Other tablets found in Turios refer to Persephone, queen of the world below, and the steps needed to successfully enter the underworld.³³³ Having entered through the right path, and having drunk from the lagoon of Mnemosyne whilst avoiding drinking from the river Lethe and being questioned by the guardians of the lagoon of the goddess of memories, the soul is meant to take the sacred pathway which will lead to Persephone.³³⁴ This goddess has the last word on the fate of the soul of men, she is the one who determines their immortal fate.³³⁵ Nevertheless, Dionysus also plays an important role in her final decision since the soul should have been previously freed by him.³³⁶ This portrays Dionysus as Persephone's advisor,³³⁷ further emphasising the connection that is shared by these two deities.³³⁸ It is in the presence of Persephone that the deceased must state the appropriate passwords which will allow them to enter their next state of being,³³⁹ which can be interpreted as a resurrection of sorts, and/or be seen as a symbolic reference to the realm of divinity, just as in the case with Dionysus Zagreus, therefore viewing the resurrected as a new son of the goddess.³⁴⁰

³³¹ Fr. 474 in Bernabé 2003: 256-257, 265.

³³² Bernabé 2003: 265.

³³³ Fr. 488, 489-490 in Bernabé 2003: 271.

³³⁴ Bernabé 2003: 273.

³³⁵ Bernabé 2003: 272-274.

³³⁶ Bernabé 2003: 273.

³³⁷ Bernabé 2003: 272.

³³⁸ Rigoglioso 2010:109, Bernabé 2003: 104, 177, 181-185.

³³⁹ Bernabé 2003: 273-275.

³⁴⁰ Bernabé 2003: 271-273.

Rumours and Tales

The following chapter aims to provide an insight to yet a different aspect of the role of the goddess Persephone. An inspection of ancient myths and tales in which she is depicted as a minor character will be carried on so that all elements that form part of the mythological character of Persephone can be examined.

Apart from the brief forced affair with her father, Zeus, and her becoming consort to Hades,³⁴¹ Persephone is said to have had an affair with Adonis, a minor deity of vegetation and rebirth.³⁴² Depending on the source, Adonis was depicted as being sent down to the underworld as a punishment for having caused the death of Hippolytus, and thus earning the wrath of the goddess Artemis.³⁴³ Another source reveals Adonis being sent to Persephone in the underworld as a baby by Aphrodite,³⁴⁴ however when it was time for the young god to go back to the goddess of love, Persephone refused to let him part from the land of the dead.³⁴⁵ In both versions of the myth, Zeus intervened and dictated that Adonis was to spend one third of the year with Persephone³⁴⁶, this is also described in an Orphic Hymn where the young god is portrayed as descending to the bed of the infernal goddess.³⁴⁷ Another third

³⁴¹ Bremmer 2010.

³⁴² Encyclopædia Britannica 2018.

³⁴³ Eur. Hipp. 1

³⁴⁴ Apollod. 1.3

³⁴⁵ Apollod. 1.3,

³⁴⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica 2018.

³⁴⁷ OH 56 in Bernabé 2009.

of the year, was meant to be spent with Aphrodite and the rest of the time was for him to do as he pleased, which he later chose to give to Aphrodite.³⁴⁸ It is worth noting that Adonis connection to the concept of rebirth, could be a result of him having to leave the underworld after his time with Persephone came to an end, further emphasising the idea that when someone leaves the underworld, a process of rebirth is taking place.³⁴⁹

Moreover, there is another reference to Persephone regarding her being Hades' consort. One tale describes her as responsible for the death of the nymph Minthe, who was said to be Hades' concubine. Persephone crushed and transformed her into a herb.³⁵⁰ Another myth discusses an unsuccessful attempt to kidnap Persephone from the underworld,³⁵¹ "*Theseus was assisted by Perithous in the rape of Helen and joined Perithous in the attempt to abduct Persephone.*"³⁵²

Persephone is also briefly mentioned in the tales of the *katabasis* of the Greek hero Orpheus, who went to the underworld to retrieve his wife Euridyke.³⁵³ She is portrayed as a compassionate and emphatic goddess who was moved by Orpheus' song and pain, showing yet another aspect to Persephone's character. This benevolent persona is also shown on the story that mentions Alkestis, wife to the king Admetos, who volunteered to die

³⁴⁸ Apollod. 1.3, Bremmer 2010

³⁴⁹ Burkert 1987:99-100.

³⁵⁰ Strab. 8.3.14, Ov. Met. 10.728.

³⁵¹ Diod. 4.73.3, Plat. Rep. 3.391c-d.

³⁵² Plat. Rep. 3.391d

³⁵³ Diod. 4.25.4, Ov. Met. 10.8 ff. See Serrano 1999 for more information about Katabasis.

instead of her husband, however, Persephone allowed her to return to the land of the living.³⁵⁴

The way in which Persephone and her actions are described in all these myths suggests that the goddess was regarded as a forgiving deity, one with a softer side who represented light in the underworld.³⁵⁵ This depiction provides us with a different element that forms the overall image of the discussed goddess.

³⁵⁴ Apoll. 1.106.

³⁵⁵ Coombe 2018:77.

Conclusion

To conclude, Persephone has shown to be an extremely flexible and adaptable character in ancient literature. The evolution of a maiden goddess into the queen of the underworld goes beyond a simple myth about her being sequestered into the netherworld, instead, it is a process that is ingrained into its culture and society. In order to understand all the aspects that form the ultimate image of the goddess Persephone, one should explore the role that her worship had on the people that believed in her existence.

The surviving literary evidence encompasses a range of works that go from hymns and prose, to dedications in her name and brief mentions of the goddess in texts that are about the myths and tales of different deities. Moreover, due to the fragmentary nature of the surviving evidence, the task of interpreting and analysing it, is not an easy one. Nevertheless, it does demonstrate a character that is multi-faceted and complex, which correlates with the amount and wide variety of areas she is considered the patron goddess or the physical embodiment of. From the birth of mankind to its death and afterlife, Persephone plays an essential role.³⁵⁶ As its creator she saw the birth of mankind as a species,³⁵⁷ and as an entity with the power that dictates the fate of men, given that she weaves the universe,³⁵⁸ Persephone also oversees the souls and afterlife, be it in punishment, rebirth or Elysium, of each and every man and woman who is born.³⁵⁹ Therefore, this gives her an

³⁵⁶ Burkert 1987, Mylonas 1961:7

³⁵⁷ Ov. Met. i. 81, Apollod. i. 7.

³⁵⁸ Coombe 2018:71-91.

³⁵⁹ Bernabé 2003:251-252.

exceptional connection to mankind, as well as places her in a unique position within the Greco-Roman pantheons. This work has explored the different areas of her personality, roles, and her depiction in ancient literature, exploring the evolution of her character, physical appearance, and role within society. By doing so, it has become possible to create a fuller and more understood image of Persephone. Arguably, she has one of the most varied 'job descriptions', and, through the close relationship she has with gods and mortals alike, can be considered one of the most important goddesses in Greco-Roman mythology.

Additionally, this research has used a varied number of ancient sources that represent different genres within literature. Whilst this could prove to be advantageous given that it includes different source material, and thus can be viewed as using a holistic approach, there are many variables that should be considered when working with such a diverse range of sources, such as: intended audience, period in which it was created, purpose of the passage, to name a few.

All in all, Persephone has been revealed as a highly relevant mythological character, whose study demonstrates how society has changed along with the adaptation of our beliefs, religious practices and overall concepts and definitions of life, death, and rebirth.

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