

THESEUS' AND PEIRITHOOS' DESCENT INTO THE UNDERWORLD

Humankind has long been interested in knowing the Beyond, which has often been conceptualised as an area below the earth or as a land at the edge of the known world. The border between this world and the Beyond constituted a challenge that in myth and legend proved to be irresistible to many a hero. In Greek mythology the most famous descents are those by Odysseus, Heracles and Orpheus, but in this contribution I intend to look in detail at a less familiar one, that by Theseus and Peirithoos. First, however, I will briefly discuss the earliest known literary descent, that by Enkidu (§ 1), which almost certainly influenced the poet of the *Odyssey* in his depiction of Odysseus' descent. Then I will take a brief look at some descents in the Archaic Age, in particular the earliest traditions of Theseus and Peirithoos (§ 2). Subsequently, I will analyse the actual descent of these heroes (§ 3) and I will conclude with some observations on the drama *Peirithoos*, which was written by either Critias or Euripides (§ 4).

Gilgamesh and Enkidu

In literature, we probably find the Beyond first thematized in the Sumerian poem *Bilgames* (the Sumerian form of Gilgamesh)¹ and the *Netherworld*, one of a series of Sumerian narrative poems about Gilgamesh. It was known in ancient times as *In those days, in those far-off days*². This vague title is symbolic of our knowledge about its precise time of composition, but its last part probably dates from the beginning of the second millennium BCE³. In this poem, which was highly popular in the Mesopotamian school tradition (it has survived in more than sixty manuscripts), it is told in the last Tablet (below) that Gilgamesh had been playing a kind of croquet in the streets of Uruk. When his ball and mallet

1. For the name, see G. RUBIO (2012); J. KEETMAN (2014).

2. For the circumstances of composition, see the splendid new edition of the Gilgamesh epic by A. R. GEORGE (2003), vol. I, p. 12-14 (summary of the text), vol. II, p. 743-777 (text and translation of 172-End). All quotations are from this edition.

3. W. SALLABERGER (2008), p. 69.

fell down through a whole deep into the Underworld, his servant Enkidu offered to fetch them. Gilgamesh instructed him not to draw attention from the shades, but “Enkidu paid no attention to (the word) of his master” (206), and the Underworld seized him (221). Fortunately, the Sun God Utu brought Enkidu back. Gilgamesh hugged and kissed him, and asked him what he had seen: “Did you see the man with one son?”, to which Enkidu answers with “I saw him”. Gilgamesh then asks: “How does he fare?” (255), and Enkidu answers: “For the peg set in his wall bitterly he laments” (256). Gilgamesh then poses a series of similar questions until we have reached the man with seven sons, and from the answers it is clear that the more sons a man has, the less thirsty he will be in the Underworld.

It is likely that the Sumerian text of *Bilgames and the Netherworld* was independently handed down in Babylon for many centuries before its latter part became appended to the Gilgamesh epic as Tablet XII in an Akkadian prose translation. At the end of the eighth century, shortly after the death of Sargon in 705 BCE in Iran during a battle against the Cimmerians, the Assyrian scholar Nabû-zuqup-kenu wrote in the colophon that he had copied his translation from an older master-copy, which was probably made in Babylon sometime in the second millennium⁴. The reason for its addition to the Gilgamesh epic is not certain. But the moment of its appendage might suggest that the death of Sargon and many of his soldiers inspired Nabû-zuqup-kenu to look for a suitable text to end the epic, as death in battle is mentioned as one of the forms of death enumerated by the Sumerian poem (268o1), and rituals of commemoration were very important both for the original Sumerian poem and its Akkadian translation⁵. However, this has to remain speculative: we simply do not know.

As the summary shows, we have in these two versions a proper descent into the Underworld, which also displays an interest in the fate of the deceased. Interestingly, though, it is not the hero himself, Gilgamesh, who goes down, but Enkidu, “his servant” (177), whose inferior status is also stressed later: the Sumerian version explicitly states that he paid no attention to the words of “his master” (206). Moreover, Enkidu does not have to travel large distances to arrive at the Underworld: the Beyond is, so to speak, just around the corner, and there is no dangerous journey necessary to reach it. In Mesopotamia, then, unlike ancient Greece, as we will see shortly, it was not the great hero himself who braved the Underworld. We should note, on the other hand, that Enkidu reports his findings in the first person singular. After a question by Gilgamesh, he stresses each time: “I

4. That is all we can say about the time of its composition, cf. A. R. GEORGE (2003), vol. I, p. 49.

5. E. FRAHM (1999); A. R. GEORGE (2003), vol. I, p. 49-54.

saw him” (102, 104, 106, 108, etc.), and then gives further details. The information about the Underworld is clearly authenticated as deriving from an eyewitness report.

Archaic Greek descents

There are clear similarities and differences between Gilgamesh and Homer, although fewer scholars will now deny that the first had some kind of influence on the latter’s epic, however we imagine the process of transmission to have occurred ⁶. A plausible influence from the Gilgamesh epic, for example, is the repeated use of “I saw” by Odysseus in his report of his own descent (*Od.*, XI, 281, 298, 576, 582, 593), which parallels the way of authentication by Enkidu (§ 1). Yet an important difference is that the oldest Greek descents into the Underworld can be characterised as heroic feats that demonstrated the power, cunning or arrogance of those heroes who managed to descend into the Underworld and to come up again. The descent of Theseus and Peirithoos is among these.

We first hear about such descents in Homer, but the allusive character of some of the passages strongly suggests that the idea already pre-existed Homer, even if we cannot say for how long ⁷. This is especially apparent from the end of the *Nékyia*, which describes the visit of Odysseus to the Underworld. The last person he meets is Heracles. Evidently, the encounter is the climax of Odysseus’ own visit: even Heracles, the mightiest hero of the Greeks, had to die and remain in the Underworld, as he bitterly complains. Yet he also tells Odysseus about the Athenian king Eurystheus: “and once he sent me here to fetch the dog, since he could not think of any more difficult labour for me. I carried him off and led him out of Hades, and Hermes and owl-eyed Athena escorted me” (*Od.*, XI, 621-626; see also *Il.*, VIII, 362-369). In other words, the descent into the Underworld was the culmination of Heracles’ labours, and the, clearly indispensable, help of the gods shows the difficulty of descending into the Underworld. Although the dog is still nameless in the *Odyssey*, from Hesiod onwards it was almost unanimously agreed that it had been Cerberus, the watchdog of the Underworld ⁸. A Corinthian cup from the early sixth century BCE and Athenian vases from the middle of that century onwards already portray Heracles’ visit to the

6. See most recently M. L. WEST (1997), p. 334-437; B. LOUDEN (2011), p. 205-207; B. CURRIE (2012), p. 543-623; J. HAUBOLD (2013), p. 18-72.

7. For another early descent, that of Dionysos, see M. A. SANTAMARÍA ÁLVAREZ (2014), p. 217-40.

8. But note Critias *TrGF* 43 F 1: Ἄιδου κύων.

Underworld and his capture of Cerberus: striking testimonies to the early date of this labour of Heracles and its popularity⁹.

Given the popularity of Heracles' descent, we need not be surprised that Odysseus also mentioned a descent by the Athenian hero Theseus with the Thessalian Peirithoos (*Od.*, XI, 631), although the line may be a somewhat later insertion used to boost the fame of Theseus. This, at least, is what the historian Hereas of Megara (ca. 300 BCE: *FGrH* 486 F 1) argued, suggesting that the line was inserted by Pisistratus. Yet given the lively competition between Athens and Megara precisely in the area of mythology¹⁰, we need not believe this¹¹. In any case, there can be no doubt that the descent goes back to the late Archaic Age, as we can see the duo with Heracles, all three identified by their names, in Hades on an Argive shield-band dating to about 575-550 BCE, which was found in Olympia¹². This is about the same time that we hear of Theseus participating in the battle of the Lapiths against the Centaurs in pseudo-Hesiod's *Shield* (182) and see the duo on the famous François Vase¹³. The descent received its canonical form in Apollodorus, who tells us:

Having made an agreement with Peirithoos that they would marry daughters of Zeus, Theseus, with the help of Peirithoos, abducted Helen from Sparta for himself, when she was twelve years old. In an attempt to win Persephone as a bride for Peirithoos he went down to Hades [...]. But when Theseus arrived with Peirithoos in Hades, he was duped; for, on the pretence that they were about to partake of his hospitality, Hades bade them first be seated in the Chair of Forgetfulness. But they stuck to it and were held fast by coils of serpents. Peirithoos, therefore, remained bound for ever in Hades, but Heracles brought Theseus up and sent him to Athens (*Ep.*, I, 24).

The role of Heracles is somewhat elaborated earlier by Apollodorus in his account of Heracles' Labours:

And having come near to the gates of Hades, he saw Theseus and Peirithoos, who tried to win Persephone's hand in marriage and for that reason was in bonds. When they caught sight of Heracles, they stretched their hands as if they could rise up through his might. But he took Theseus by the hands and raised him, but although he also wanted to raise Peirithoos he let go when the earth shook (II, 5, 12)¹⁴.

Yet these accounts are not the earliest surviving ones. Pausanias (IX, 31, 5) both mentions a Hesiodic poem on Theseus' and Peirithoos' descent

9. *LIMC* V.1, s.v. "Herakles M", p. 85-100 (Valerie SMALLWOOD).

10. See J. N. BREMMER (2012b), updated in J. N. BREMMER (2014), p. 166-179.

11. Cf. U. VON WILAMOWITZ-MOELLENDORFF (1971), p. 116: *unzweifelhaft echt*.

12. P. SIEWERT, H. TAEUBER (2013), p. 155 (with the most recent bibliography).

13. For the vase, see now H. A. SHAPIRO *et al.* (ed.) (2013).

14. I follow the text of the new edition by M. PPATHOMOPOULOS (2010); see now also F. J. CUARTERO I IBORRA (2012).

into the Underworld and a version of that descent in the *Minyas* (10.28.2), to which the well-known fragment F 280 of Hesiod, relating a dialogue between Theseus and Meleager in the presence of Peirithoos, has sometimes been assigned. The virtual absence of papyri from the Epic Cycle makes that less probable, and there is no reason why Archaic Greece would not know of more than one version of the descent of Theseus and Peirithoos¹⁵. Yet Ockhams' razor favours one epic scene, and there are various arguments to support its belonging to the *Minyas*, as we will see shortly. However that may be, there can be no doubt that the myth of their descent into the Underworld goes back to the late seventh or early sixth century. But who are these two heroes, why were they cooperating in the descent, and how did their descent end? Those are the questions I would like to discuss before coming to the poems themselves.

Theseus and Peirithoos

Theseus is a well known mythological figure, who does not need much elucidation, but I should stress that, in contrast to what many previous analyses have stated, he was not a hero who came to the fore only in the late sixth century. It is clear that various episodes of his life were well known in the Epic Cycle of the late seventh century, such as the capture of his mother Aithra by the Dioscures, her enslavement to Helen and her rescue by Theseus' grandsons during the fall of Troy. It fits this dating that Sappho (fr. 206 Voigt) knew his Cretan episode, as did, perhaps, Alcaeus (fr. 356 Voigt). This acquaintance with parts of the myth suggests that the figure of Theseus was already part of Ionian epic in the later seventh century¹⁶, but not in the tradition represented by the *Iliad*¹⁷. As the late Martin West (1937-2015) has argued that we have to think of Western Ionic epic in particular when talking of Ionian epic¹⁸, the occurrence of episodes of the Athenian Theseus myth in the *Iliad* may be less surprising than is often thought.

Following older scholars, M. L. West has also defended the thesis that the Ionian phase was preceded by an Aeolic epic phase¹⁹. Moreover, as he notes, this phase did leave its traces in Lesbos²⁰. The observation may help us to solve the first problem: why did the Athenian Theseus cooperate with

15. As is persuasively argued by E. CINGANO (2009), p. 126-128.

16. *Il.*, III, 144 (almost certainly interpolated); *Cypria*, fr. 13 Bernabé; *Ilias Parva*, fr. 20 Bern.; *Iliupersis* arg., cf. M. L. WEST (2013), p. 235; Alcman *PMGF* 21; R. L. FOWLER (2000-2013), vol. 2, p. 468-471.

17. E. CINGANO (2007), p. 91-102.

18. M. L. WEST (2011), p. 61-66.

19. M. L. WEST (2013), p. 55-60, 78-79, 402.

20. M. L. WEST (2013), p. 392-407.

the Thessalian Peirithoos? There can indeed be no doubt that Peirithoos derives from Thessaly. This is already the case in the *Iliad*, where he is well known and firmly connected with the Thessalian Lapiths, just as he is in the *Odyssey*²¹. His birth from Zeus' having sex with his mother in the shape of a stallion suggests an older layer of Greek mythology²², and his birth from Ixion looks fairly old too²³. Theseus and Peirithoos thus look like somewhat strange bedfellows. The explanation for their cooperation must lie in the composition of a poet that wanted to combine Thessalian and Ionic epic traditions. The place where they might have taken place could well have been Lesbos. The *Ilias Parva*, which was ascribed to Lesches from Pyrrha (Lesbos: fr. 20 Bern.) mentioned the recuperation of Aithra by Theseus' grandsons Akamas and Demophon, and we find a rationalised version of the descent into the Underworld in Hellanicus of Lesbos (*FGrH* 4 F 168 = 323a F 18 = F 168 Fowler), who relates that the two friends went to Epirus where there was a king Aidoneus with his wife Persephone and daughter Kore. Whoever wanted to marry her, had to fight with his dog Cerberus²⁴. But a rationalised version presupposes a traditional version, and it may well be that such a version had been created in Lesbos as the island where Aeolic and Ionic epic once used to meet.

Now that the descent of Theseus and Peirithoos has been shown to be fairly old, we may inquire into the motif of two heroes or friends wandering around and performing heroic exploits. What was the model for the poet who first composed the epic scene about the descent? Let us first stay within the Greek tradition. In a recent study of the Epic Cycle, Ettore Cingano has noted that the kidnappings of girls in the epic tradition are usually the work of a couple of young men, not the deed of an individual kidnapper. The obvious parallel to start with is of course the kidnapping of Helen by Theseus and Peirithoos, which undoubtedly was equally fairly old and is implied by events in the Epic Cycle²⁵. In addition, Pindarus (fr. 175 Maehler) mentions a kidnapping by Theseus and Peirithoos of Antiope, the Amazon who had fallen in love with Theseus according to another Archaic version²⁶. The descent presupposes these kidnappings and can be seen as an attempt in surpassing the earlier ones. However, Plutarch (*Thes.*, XXXI, 1)

21. *Il.*, I, 263; *Od.*, XXI, 296, 298; Hes., *Sc.*, 179. Thessalian: Ephoros, *FGrH* 70 F 23; J. N. BREMMER (2012a), p. 35-38.

22. Nonnos, *Dion.*, VII, 125; schol. *ad Il.*, I, 263. For the antiquity of these couplings, see J. N. BREMMER (1999^b, p. 18 = J. N. BREMMER [2012c], p. 42).

23. *Il.*, XIV, 318; Aesch., F *89 Radt; Critias, *TrGF* 43 F 5.9.

24. See also Philochoros, *FGrH* 328 F 18a; Favorinus, fr. 96, 16 Barigazzi; Paus., I, 17; Ael., *VH*, IV, 5; Cyrill., *Contra Jul.*, I, 12 with Riedweg *ad loc.*; Suda, κ 2078.

25. R. L. FOWLER (2000-2013), vol. 2, p. 488f.

26. Paus., I, 2, 1, cf. M. L. WEST (2013), p. 276f.

mentions that according to various authors Helen had been abducted first by Idas and Lynceus, the sons of the Messenian Aphareus and the great enemies of the Dioscures, who in turn kidnapped the Leucippids, the nieces of Aphareus. But these were not the only pair of kidnapers. Paris usually gets the blame for abducting Helen to Troy, but he was accompanied by Aeneas according to the *Cypria* and the iconographical tradition²⁷, and although their behaviour was non-violent, I would also compare here the brothers Agamemnon and Menelaos (Hes., fr. 197. 1-5 M.-W.). In all these cases, we seem to have varying transformations of the Indo-European motif of the abduction of the Sun Maiden who is rescued by her brothers, as studied again by Martin West in his splendid book on Indo-European myth and poetry²⁸.

Yet the motif of the two abductors is only one side of the coin. The other one is the fact that in all the cases we just mentioned the abductors are males on the brink of adulthood. This brings us within the range of initiation, a disputed but still useful concept in studying the behaviour of young men and women in ancient Greece²⁹. We may wonder why Theseus and Peirithoos are continuously on the go, as was of course Heracles. Now the motif of young men who roam at the margin of civilisation – and the Underworld surely is the extreme edge of the civilised world, if not beyond – is well known from ancient Greece itself. In Athens itself, but also in Euboea, Illyria and Acarnania, ephebes in historical times had to patrol the frontiers, from which activity they were called *περίπολοι*, “they who move around”, but also *κρυπτοί*, “the hidden ones”³⁰. John Ma, who has recently devoted an important study to the phenomenon, stresses the fact that in the historical period these marginal youths were fully integrated into the civil society and often *νέοι* rather than ephebes, as integration and socialisation took place over a longer period of time than just the Athenian ephebic two years³¹.

Moreover, sometimes these youths functioned as crack troops, a bit like the English SAS or American Green Berets, and were able to use the weapons of hoplites. The problem is of course, although not spelled out as such by John Ma, that in historical time different cities and communities developed their Archaic institutions in different ways, and we usually are not informed about the original Archaic situation. In other words, all reconstructions are speculative. However, we can at least note that the motif of wandering around during initiation must be old, as it is also well attested among

27. E. CINGANO (2011), p. 18-20.

28. M. L. WEST (2007), p. 230, 232, 237.

29. See my arguments in J. N. BREMMER (2016, forthcoming).

30. Aristot., *Athen.*, 42; *IG* II² 1006, 1011, 1028; L. ROBERT (1955); P. VIDAL-NAQUET (1983²), p. 153, 195; P. CABANES (1991), p. 197-221.

31. J. MA (2008).

other Indo-European peoples³², in particular for the Arcadian youths, Iranian young men and the Irish *Fiana*, and the motif survived in the legends of the Arthurian knights' errands³³. A similar development occurred in Central-Asia where the youths of the Turkmens, Uzbeks and Kirghisians were charged with the task of guarding the frontiers³⁴.

The wandering was also part of the ancient Germanic education, since it was customary in the early Middle Ages that the *iuvenes*, the sons of nobility, were roaming through the country; in fact, they showed all the characteristics of an age-group in the liminal period between youth and adulthood³⁵. Now mythology is not a direct reflection of historical rituals but refracts and dramatises the historical, ritual reality. And precisely in early Germanic epics, songs and fairy tales we have stories of pairs of youths and mentors, such as Isung and Vildiver, Ise and Orendel, Eisenhans and Bärenhäuter, Gigas and Hythinus, which all seem to point to motifs of initiation, even though refracted through different lenses³⁶.

In the case of Peirithoos and Theseus, we should note that in the early iconographical tradition Peirithoos usually is bearded, but Theseus not³⁷. This supports a conclusion that Peirithoos was older than Theseus, a feature further supported by the mention of the former's son in the *Iliad*; the fragment of Hesiod or Pseudo-Hesiod that recalls his deceased wife Hippodameia also suggests that, traditionally, Peirithoos was older than Theseus³⁸. One may wonder if this combination of an older mentor wandering around with his young pupil is not also reflected in the pairing of Silenos and Dionysos. The myth appears on Greek vases as early as the second quarter of the sixth century³⁹, and Herodotus (VIII, 138) and Xenophon (*Anab.*, I, 2, 13) refer to it before we get a fuller report by Ovid (*Met.*, XI, 89-105). The initiatory motifs in the myths of Dionysos are well known, such as his education at a marginal island of Attic mainland and his trav-

32. I summarize and update here a paragraph from J. N. BREMMER (1978), p. 30-32.

33. Arcadian youths: J. N. BREMMER (2007), p. 73-74; Iranian: G. WIDENGREN (1953), p. 59-62, and (1969), p. 86-92. *Fiana*: A. REES, B. REES (1973), p. 62-69; J. NAGY (1985).

34. R. BLEICHSTEINER (1953), p. 73.

35. Astronomus, *Vita Hludowici pii imperatoris* (MG SS 119), c. 46 *sicut moris talibus est*, cf. U. HELFENSTEIN (1952), p. 41-81; G. DUBY (1973), p. 213-225; Marie-Luce CHÉNERIE (1976), p. 327-368.

36. O. HÖFLER (1992), p. 29-41.

37. Eleni MANAKIDOU (1994, p. 240) notes *einen gewissen Altersunterschied*; Himerius, *Or.*, 54.

38. Polypoites: *Il.*, II, 741-742, XII, 129, 182. Hippodameia: *Il.*, II, 741-742, Hes., fr. 280. 28 M.-W.

39. M. MILLER (1996), p. 846-851.

esty⁴⁰. And it is not surprising that a connection between Silenos and initiation was already noticed by Henri Jeanmaire (1884-1960), who of course also noted the initiatory character of Dionysos' travesty in his classic *Couroi et Courètes*⁴¹.

Having looked at the protagonists, let us now turn to their actual descent. Our tradition has not much to tell about the failure of their attempt to woo Persephone. It is clear that they were trapped by Hades and kept in the Underworld until Heracles liberated (one of) them. This is the picture not only in the *Odyssey*, but also in the already mentioned late-Archaic *Minyas* (Paus., X, 28, 2, cf. *Minyas* fr. dub. 7 Bernabé = Hes. fr. 280 M.-W.); in Panyassis (fr. 9 Davies = fr. 14 Bernabé), where they are stuck to a rock; and on Polygnotos' painting in the Cnidian lesche (Paus., X, 29, 9), albeit in a less undignified posture. This clearly is the older situation, which is still referred to in the hypothesis of Critias' *Peirithoos* (cf. Critias, *TrGF* 43 F 6). The stress by Virgil on Theseus' eternal imprisonment (*Aen.*, VI, 617: *sedet aeternumque sedebit*, with HORSFALL *ad loc.*) in the Underworld shows that he was acquainted with this tradition and disputed the tradition that Theseus was liberated by Heracles who, at least in some sources, left Peirithoos where he was⁴²; in fact, the early iconographical tradition unanimously suggests only the liberation of Theseus⁴³.

According to several later sources, but at least since the early second-century lexicographer Pausanias (λ 20 Erbse), the liberation cost Theseus and Peirithoos a part of their behinds⁴⁴. The motif probably derives from ancient traditions that one cannot escape the Underworld without paying a small price. It is well attested in folktales where the hero that escapes the falling door of the Underworld loses a piece of his heel⁴⁵. The motif is familiar also from the *Rigveda* and the passage of the Argo through the Clashing Rocks, losing only a piece of its stern ornament, just like the dove that preceded the Argo lost only its tail feather⁴⁶.

In conclusion, it seems that the Archaic poet who first wrote a poem on the *katábasis* of Theseus and Peirithoos or a poem in which this *katábasis* appeared, took his inspiration from various traditional poetic motifs. His *bricolage* survived the Archaic Age, albeit only fragmentarily, as we have

40. J. N. BREMMER (1999a).

41. H. JEANMAIRE (1939), p. 354, 371.

42. Hypothesis Critias' *Pirithoos* (cf. fr. 6); Philochoros, *FGrH* 328 F 18; Diod. Sic., IV, 26, 1; IV, 63, 4; Hor., *C.*, III, 4, 80; Hyg., *Fab.*, 79; Apollod., II, 5, 12, *Ep.*, I, 23-24.

43. Eleni MANAKIDOU (1994), p. 241.

44. For all sources, see Chr. THEODORIDIS on Photius λ 348.

45. K. SPIESS (1939-1940), p. 92-104.

46. Asclepiades, *FGrH* 12 F 2, 31; Apoll. Rhod., II, 571-573, 601; M. L. WEST (2007), p. 158-159, with further Indian parallels.

seen. Let me conclude with a few observations on our two oldest longer texts containing this tradition. The oldest one, be it from (pseudo-)Hesiod or the *Minyas*, is still rather close to the *Odyssey* in motifs and language as Marco Antonio Santamaría Álvarez has recently shown⁴⁷. Martin West has demonstrated that the descent in the *Nostoi* is also very close to the one in the *Odyssey* and has attractively suggested that it contained a visit by Menelaos to the Underworld, where he saw Agamemnon, the sinner Tantalos and various women⁴⁸. The observation is important, as it shows that towards the end of the seventh century there was an interest in descent poetry, which concentrated on meetings with famous heroes, sinners and noble women, although the presence of the latter feature is not easy to understand.

Unfortunately, the scene that is left does not enable us to see the context of their descent, but it seems clear that the heroic duo will be contained in the Underworld and as such do not see sinners but are themselves sinners. Moreover, Meleager's apparent ignorance of the fate of Peirithoos' wife Hippodameia does not really fit the way women are mentioned in the descents in the *Odyssey* and the *Nostoi*. These differences suggest a somewhat later development and, despite the parallels with the *Odyssey*, fit the *Minyas* better than a proximity to Hesiod. Still, the fragmentary nature of the scene prevents us from being certain.

The drama *Peirithoos*

We are somewhat better informed about the drama *Peirithoos*, which must date to the later fifth century, although we cannot really decide whether it was written by Euripides or Critias⁴⁹. Despite the fact that the authoritative edition by Bruno SNELL and Richard KANNICHT (*TrGF* 43, 1986²) opts for Critias, Euripides seems a good candidate still⁵⁰. This uncertainty means that we also cannot be certain regarding its date, although a performance in the last decades of the fifth century seems probable. The date would also fit the philosophical fragments (F 3-4 Sn.-K.), which make a somewhat Orphic impression. Actually, this element may also point to Euripides, as he became increasingly interested in Orphism in the course of

47. M. A. SANTAMARÍA ÁLVAREZ (forthcoming).

48. M. L. WEST (2013), p. 271-282.

49. For an important stage in the discussion about the authenticity, see Giovanna ALVONI (2011).

50. See the sensible balance of the century-old discussions in C. COLLARD, M. CROPP (2008), p. 630-635. For a possible connection with Euripides' *Heracles*, see H. J. METTE (1988)² [1983], p. 33-39.

his career⁵¹. In any case, we are clearly beyond the Archaic Age, as the Chorus probably consists of Eleusinian initiates (F 2 Sn.-K.) in the Underworld. Now Hugh Lloyd-Jones (1922-2009) has reconstructed an epic *katábasis* of Heracles, in which he was initiated by Eumolpos in Eleusis before starting his descent at Laconian Taenarum⁵². H. Lloyd-Jones dated this poem to the middle of the sixth century, and the date is supported by a shard in the manner of Exekias of about 540 BCE that shows Heracles amidst Eleusinian gods and heroes⁵³. This epic poem influenced in turn the poem of Orpheus' descent to the Underworld⁵⁴, and one may wonder if our playwright drew on this poem as well.

From the fragments of the *Peirithoos* we do not learn very much about Theseus and Peirithoos' descent, but the Hypothesis presents what must be a good summary of the play. It mentions that Peirithoos is guarded by snakes⁵⁵, which reminds us of the description of the sinners in Apollodorus as "But they stuck to it and were held fast by coils of serpents". Directly or indirectly, the words may derive from the tragedy: a serpent is also mentioned in a very fragmentary papyrus (F 4a Sn.-K.²), but that is all we can say. The liberation by Heracles is mentioned, and the Prologue does indeed introduce Heracles (F 1 Sn.-K.). We do not see sinners⁵⁶, but instead Peirithoos tells in some detail about the deed of Ixion, who tried to rape Hera, and of his punishment on a wheel (F 5 Sn.-K.). In that respect the tragedy is still the heir to the Archaic descent tradition. But the focus of the tragedy is rather on the friendship displayed by Theseus to Peirithoos in the Underworld, as is clear from the Hypothesis. It is not surprising, then, that Peirithoos mentions that Theseus is joined to him "in the unforged fetters of a sense of honour" (F 6 Sn.-K., tr. Collard-Cropp), whereas he himself clearly is tied down with forged fetters. Friendship is, of course, a favourite theme of Euripides, who was clearly very much interested in the phenomenon of friendship (witness Medea and Aegeus in the *Medea*, Theseus and Heracles in *HF*, and Orestes and Pylades in *IT*). In fact, several later authors compare Theseus and Peirithoos to prototypical pairs of

51. Franziska EGLI (2003), p. 49-53; Ruth SCODEL (2011), p. 79-98; A. MELERO (2012).

52. H. LLOYD-JONES (1967) [= 1990, p. 167-187]; see also R. PARKER (1996), p. 98-100.

53. J. BOARDMAN *et al.* (1988), p. 805-808.

54. For these poems, see J. N. BREMMER (2014), p. 190-193.

55. For a new text of the Hypothesis, see now Giovanna ALVONI (2006), p. 291.

56. Giovanna ALVONI (2008), p. 40-48.

friends, such as Orestes and Pylades or Achilles and Patroclus⁵⁷. But that is all we can say about the descent of Theseus and Peirithoos in the Archaic and Classical Age. In the end, the fragmentary nature of our tradition prevents us from shedding more light in the darkness of their Underworld⁵⁸.

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57. Xen., *Symp.*, VIII, 31 (O. and P.); Dio Chrys., LXXIV, 28 (O. and P.); Luc., *Tox.*, 10 (A. and P.); see also Giovanna ALVONI (2006), p. 294, n. 23, with many references for their proverbial friendship.

58. I am most grateful to Suzanne Lye for her meticulous correction of my English.

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