

ISSN : 0971-5681

Yavanika
यवनिका
γιαβανικα

**JOURNAL OF THE
INDIAN SOCIETY FOR
GREEK AND ROMAN STUDIES**

No.3

1993

SERPENTINE POWER IN GREECE AND INDIA

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The essential role played by serpents in some mythical Greek episodes does not appear to be sufficiently clarified. In view of the impossibility to find decisive explanations in the Hellenic culture itself, we decided to use an instrument of historical- religious analysis, the comparative method, to find an extra- Hellenic example with a sufficient degree of relevancy to enlighten the religious "reality" that underlines these serpentine episodes.¹ The country where the systematization of the symbolism of the serpent is accessible and with a suitable development for our purpose, is India. In this multiform culture we will try to find an example that offers an explanatory linkage for the sparse information that survives in the Hellenic culture.

1) Diviners, serpents and staves.

1.1) *Melampous and Teiresias.*

Several Greek mythological characters attain mantic capacity because of their contact with serpents. *Melampous* and *Teiresias* are exemplary, illustrating two different ways to reach the transmutation of common human nature into a superior one (the conversion into diviners, mediators between gods and men).

The serpents lick the ears² of *Melampous*³; he obtains the comprehension of bird language and guesses the future. He later becomes a *iatromantis*, a healer using sacred dances (he is a girls' initiator⁴) but also other physical (perhaps his own name is a reference to the use of plants in healing⁵) or supernatural methods.

Teiresias obtains mantic power in two different ways which differ according to the classical sources we use. In the first version

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that starts with Hesiod. (fr. 275 M/W = Dichaiarchos fr. 37 Wehrli = Callimachus fr. 576 Pfeiffer- Phleg. 257 F 36 Jacoby-) and is transmitted for example by Apollodorus (III{70} 6, 7) Hyginus (75) and Ovid (*Met.* III, 322ff.)⁶ the gift of divination is conferred by Zeus because of the mediation in the controversy against Hera to decide which of the sexes find more pleasure in copulation. Teiresias has been man and woman and was thus qualified to answer that the greater pleasure is perceived by the woman. Zeus, the feminine secret unveiled, attains the victory; but Hera, vexed, blinds Teiresias. Teiresias' change of sex is motivated by the fact that he had touched or wounded with his staff, two serpents entwined in sexual intercourse. The other version⁷, transmitted by Pherekydes (3 F 92a Jacoby - Apollod. III {70}, 6, 7-) Callimachus (*H.* V, 5, 75ff.) and Nonnos (*D.* V, 337 ff.) states that Athena, seen naked by Teiresias, was obliged to punish him with blindness, but to compensate Chariclo, mother of the diviner and loyal servant of the goddess, she purified his ears and bestowed on him the gift of understanding the language of birds. Furthermore, she offered him a staff that allowed him to walk like a sighted person.

Despite the differences observed, the background of both versions is similar in essence:

(a) the blindness is compensated with the gift of divination (that turns out to be an alternative way of seeing)

(b) the decisive role played by the serpents in the sexual mutation of Teiresias in the first version seems very similar to the purification of the ears effected by Athena (evidently the same *modus operandi* of the serpents with Melampous) in the second version.

1.2) *The serpentine staff*

In the version transmitted, for example, by Ovid (*Met.* III, 316 ff.) or Hyginus (75)⁸, Teiresias touches the copulating serpents with his staff, triggering the metamorphosis. Evidently Teiresias' action momentarily creates a figure whose iconographical shape is a staff with intertwined serpents. Such

a staff already existed in the Hellenic culture, taking the technical name *kerykeion* (κηρύκειον)⁹ and was used by Hermes on the divine level and the heralds on the human level, as can be seen in iconography¹⁰ (*illustration 1*). An interesting text of Hyginus (*Astron*, II, 7, 2)¹¹ narrates the manner in which Hermès obtains the serpentine staff, in circumstances identical with those originating Teiresias' sexual mutation (only the interpretation differs, the separation of the serpents is understood as a pacification, according to the major function of the *kerykeion* as staff of the mediator). The link between both evidences is clear¹², and we believe that the meaning must be similar.

All the bearers of the serpentine staff (Teiresias included in the group) have a common link: they are mediators; the heralds on the political level, Teiresias between genders and later between gods and men. Hermes, the most interesting, in a wholistic field, uniting with his presence the underworld, the sky and the earth, moving between the kingdoms of the gods and the land of humans, linking divergent and opposed spaces¹³.

1.3) *Branchos : the diviner without serpent.*

An episode in the life of Branchos, the mythical founder of the Didyma's oracle and ancestor of the priestly lineage of the Branchidai, is significant for our purposes and determines the name of the character. According to Cono, while Brancho's mother was in labour, she had a vision in which the sun penetrated by his mouth, and passing through the stomach, ended the path in sex¹⁴ (evidently an "experience of light"¹⁵). Because of this visionary experience (the sun passed through the βράγχος, ^{branchidai} tubes, she named her son Branchos (Βράγχος). Later, his homosexual love for Apollo leads to the conversion of Branchos into a powerful diviner (*Branchios* is one of the epithets of the god.)

In an attempt to explain the vision of Branchos' mother, the episodes of Melampous and Teiresias and the serpentine head of the *kerykeion* we have resorted to a religious tradition

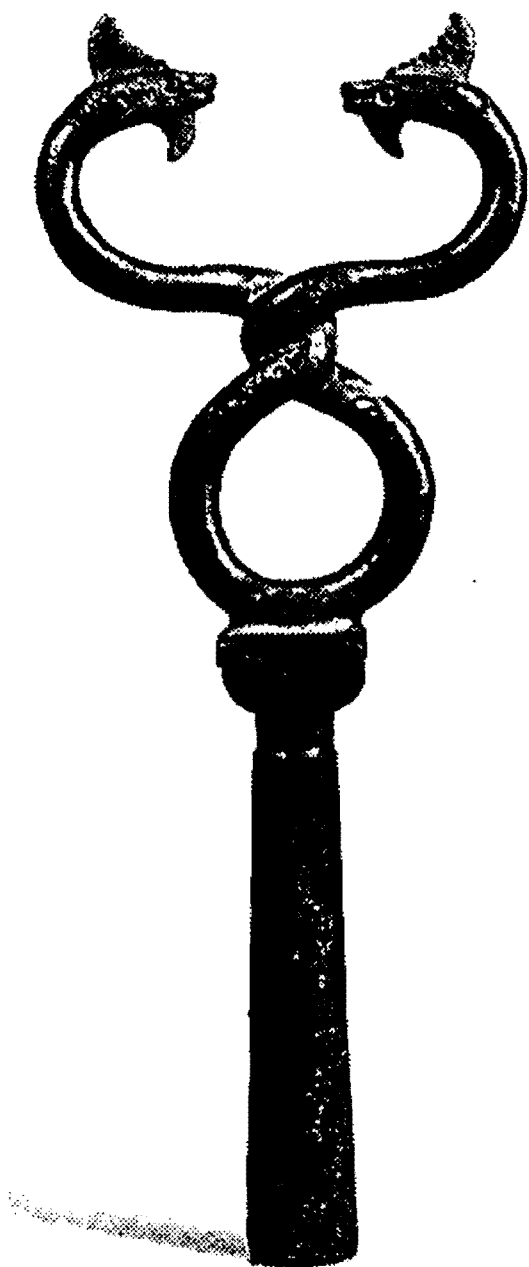
that displays in a structured manner most of the elements that scattered throughout Greek mythology are incoherent.

2) Serpentine power and Tantric mystical physiology.¹⁶

2.1) *The origin and antiquity of Tantrism.*

The major drawback to using Tantrism in comparative religion is the lack of literary evidence of the movement prior to the sixth century A.D.¹⁷. But the literary transmission, or even the generalization of a doctrine does not imply the non-existence of previous strong and long-dated roots. On the one hand, the significance of the cult to *Śiva-Śakti*¹⁸, the basis of Tantrism, exhibits an evident archaism in some aspects. On the other hand, Tantrism does not seem to be a movement of rupture, and does not display elements of radical innovation. Tantrism is a religious movement that elaborates concepts pre-existing in the Vedic tradition, combining them with religious practices from different sources. The historical sociology of Tantrism is still impossible to outline (the difficulty increases the farther back), all these uncertainties making it increasingly difficult to detect the role of Prearian and popular tradition in the formation of Tantrism. The fact that the greatest development is observed in contact zones (northern India), open to foreign influences, may indicate that in these ambits the rigidity of traditional religion was surpassed, and the priestly elite embraced alternative (foreign or sociologically different) practices, Thus, we could delimit the three major roots of Tantrism, the Vedic one, the autochthonous (Prearian but perhaps popular also) and the aloctone (Asiatic Chamanic techniques, perhaps even Gnostic influences, as Mircea Eliade suggests¹⁹).

In spite of the hypothetical basis of the analysis, it seems acceptable that Tantrism is not a modern phenomenon in its roots even if the literary formulation and the major expansion were developed towards the end of the first millenium and during the first part of the second. The archaism of some Tantric practices allows us to justify the comparison with the Greek practices (we are not comparing religious forms with more than



1) Kerykeion Norbert Schimmel Collection (New York)
(note 10)



2) Hermes and sphinxes. Olpe. Gorgon painter. Athens. National Museum 19159
(note 35)

thousand years between them, but possibly practices of a similar antiquity).

2.2) *The Tantric mystical physiology.*

The basis of Tantric esoterism is the experience of liberation revealed in the adept's body²⁰ in which two powers co-exist in a latent stage, one situated in the lower part of the trunk (the feminine principle or *Śakti*), the other in the upper part of the head (masculine principle or *Śiva*). Joining both we find a number of channels (named *nāḍīs*), the three major ones being *Suṣumnā* (in a straight line and the main channel), *Idā* (left channel, lunar and feminine) and *Pingalā* (right channel, solar and masculine). The last two *nāḍīs* are entwined round *Suṣumnā*, meeting at a number of centres, named *cakra*, where subtle energy is gathered. In the most usual system called *ṣaṭcakra* (six-centred) they are seven in number (the six *cakra* and the seventh in the upper part of the skull). The lower centre, named *Mūlādhāra cakra* or *cakra* root of the *nāḍīs*, placed in the intermediate region between genitals and anus is the seat of the personal *śakti* that appears coiled among common men (named *kuṇḍalini*: the coiled one), in repose and with the appearance of a serpent. The following are *Svādhīsthāna cakra*, over the genitals, *Maṇipūra cakra* or centre of the region of the navel, *Anāhata cakra* or centre of the heart, *Viśuddha cakra* or centre in the region of the throat, *Ājñā cakra* or centre between the eyebrows where the *nāḍīs* unite to ascend to *Sahasrāra* or the lotus with a thousand petals placed in the upper part of the skull (perhaps in the fontanelle in spite of the fact that we are summarizing a subtle or mystical physiology with no real correspondence in organs or regions of the common physiology). The masculine power or *Śiva* settles in this centre and seems not to be included in the *ṣaṭcakra* system being in essence supracorporeal.

The purpose of the system is to make the serpentine power ascend from *Mūlādhāra cakra* to *Sahasrāra*; whoever reaches

this union becomes a *jīvanmukta*²¹, a person who has attained liberation of the limitations of the human condition (achieving release from the wheel of reincarnation -*Samsāra*). Serpentine power (*Kuṇḍalini*) must ascend exclusively by the central channel (*Suṣumnā*) to produce the alchemy of liberation.

2.3 Elements of comparison.

Summarizing, Tantrism shows the following elements for the comparison:

(a) the purpose of Tantric mystical physiology is the transmutation of the common human being into a truthful man, a superior creature who knows all things (because he has experienced the nature of divinity, in this case, the union between *Śiva* and *Śakti*) and in which the dissolution (*laya*) of the ordinary essence was produced.

(b) the serpent appears as the personification of the power that promotes the transmutation in the body of the adept.

(c) the sexual region is basic in the system. The canonical practices based the trigger for ascent of *Kuṇḍalini* on ascetic techniques, but other schools (perhaps the most archaic ones, close to the primitive Saivism/ Sivaism) seem to use hetero or homosexual techniques to awaken the serpentine power.

(d) the iconographical representation of the *nāḍīs* was a straight line with intertwined serpents.

(e) the *nāḍīs* *Idā* and *Pingalā* were related to the nasal breathing (perhaps *Suṣumnā* to oral breathing).

(f) to describe the fusion between *Kuṇḍalini-Śakti* and *Śiva* in *Sahasrāra* the comparison is used with the "brightness of a hundred suns" (evidently an "experience of light").

3) Comparative religion: Teiresias, Melampous, Branchos and Tantric mystical physiology.

We find a number of coincidences between the experiences of Teiresias, Melampous and Branchos and the Tantric initiates:

(a) After fulfilling these experiences, they become special beings, diviners, powerful men: Melampous is an *iatromantis*, Teiresias maintains after death intact his cognitive abilities, Branchos establishes a parental guild of diviners. The Tantric adepts, as we have seen, reached different physical and spiritual powers upon experiencing the inner mystical union. Their esoteric knowledge is a matter of small gatherings of initiates, often transmitted inside the family group. In both cases we find experiences of a minority, men without common vital trajectories.

(b) Melampous and Teiresias undergo a serpentine experience that leads to their transmutation. In the case of Melampous, the serpents purify his ears and reveal to him the knowledge of a completely different world. In the case of Teiresias, the experience with a male and female serpent (the relationship with the *nāḍīs Iḍa* and *Pingalā* seems evident) provoke the change of sex that closely resembles to the androgyny²² of the Tantric adept who experiences in his body the alchemy of the supreme mixture of masculine and feminine essences. The serpentine symbol is used in both cases in a very similar field of significance.²³

(c) The experience of the mother of Branchos is very similar to the "experience of light" of the Tantric adepts but occurs inversely, the relationship with Buddhist sexual Tantric practices in which *Bindu* (subtle energy concentrated at a point and closely connected with breathing) "let down from the upper part of the head and fills the sexual organs with a jet of quintuple light"²⁴ is clear. The nasal cavities (and also the mouth) develop in Tantrism a basic role in the respiratory exercises to awaken *Kuṇḍalini*. Without forcing the identification to the point of connecting the name Branchos (in its etymological sense) to the subtle channel *Suṣumnā*, it should be stressed that both "experiences of light" are very similar.

(d) The importance given in Greece to the kiss of the god in order to accede to complete mantic power (undoubtedly in the case of Branchos and very probably in the case of Melampous) is yet another fact of a sexual nature (in this case

not transexual as in the example of Teiresias - but clearly homosexual). We could approach these practices from the angle of the homosexual rites used in Tantrism to awaken *Kuṇḍalīnī* (anal penetration is one of the most powerful triggers to provoke the ascent of serpentine power in some sects of the left hand), but we could also, thanks to the Tantric example, attempt to deepen in the explanation of the homosexual Greek practices adopting a different approach from that utilized in the excellent works of Bernard Sergent²⁵. Greek homosexuality seems therefore to be included originally in a complex initiatic *paideia* (in both senses of initiatic)²⁶: the learning of the real essence of the human being and his potentiality, including homosexual practices with mystical purposes (to awaken the serpentine power). The experimentation of this power determines the special status of the initiate within the social group (the nobles were superior- *kalokagathoi* - because of their knowledge of this "mystery"). We propose a partial explanation of the lack of inhibitions of the Greek aristocrats (Plato at the head of the list) in the face of this kind of behaviour and also the secrecy surrounding the practice.

4) Hermes, the *kerykeion* and Gorgo.

The intertwining of the three *nāḍīs* creates a figure very similar in essence to the Greek serpentine staff named *kerykeion*. The god Hermes is normally shown bearing it in the iconography²⁷, this being one of the definitive attributes to assure identification. It seems worthwhile to analyse briefly the tasks of the god to clarify his role in the mystical physiology that we are endeavouring to unravel²⁸. A deity of ambiguity, he is the lord of the lands with diffused frontiers. He is *epitermios*, divinity of all the limits, not only the frontiers of the social topography but also the psychic or mythical one. He is the support of the traveller who crosses the frontier of the known country, of the foreigner far from his fatherland; he indicates the ambiguous point of confluence of the territory of two *poleis*; he helps thieves²⁹, working on the fringe of the social system. He is also

psychopompos, helping the dead to find the way from the world of the living to the underworld³⁰. His son (daughter) Hermaphroditos³¹ and a number of his archaic representations³² show that he moves in the sexual indetermination or even in androgyny. As herald of Zeus he unifies the human world with the reigns of the gods. He is the central divinity in the space construction of the Greeks, as pointed out by Vernant³³, he determines the links among the different ambits that give structure to the social and religious Greek imaginary. A deity of transitions (including, evidently, the "rites of passage"³⁴) he is the perfect candidate for presiding over practices that include a transition to a different sort of existence and an ascensional ritual. Iconography could assist in illustrating this. In one of the earliest images of the god, in the *opib* of the Gorgon painter (circa 600-590 BC) in the National Museum of Athens³⁵ (illustration 2), Hermes is portrayed with the *kerykeion* held aloft his right hand and flanked by two winged sphinxes. The image is included in a series of representations dated between 600 and 560 in which Hermes is flanked by mythical winged creatures (sphinxes or sirens³⁶). The meaning of the scenes does not seem to be completely clarified (the interpretation of the master of animals seems much too simple). The scene can be interpreted by comparison with the relief of the Cretan bronze helmet in the Norbert Schimmel Collection (New York)³⁷ (illustration 3) showing two winged youths holding intertwined serpents. Hermes in the first case fulfils the same role as the serpents in the second and the *kerykeion* in the centre of the image seems to emphasize this significance. To control the serpentine power is the task of the god and the winged beings are a representation of the ascension included in the rite. Seen from this point of view, we could almost risk an attribution to the pair of winged genies of the New York helmet. This doublet is in essence only one (with the same significance as the ambiguous god who presides over the serpentine power), being like a double Hermes.

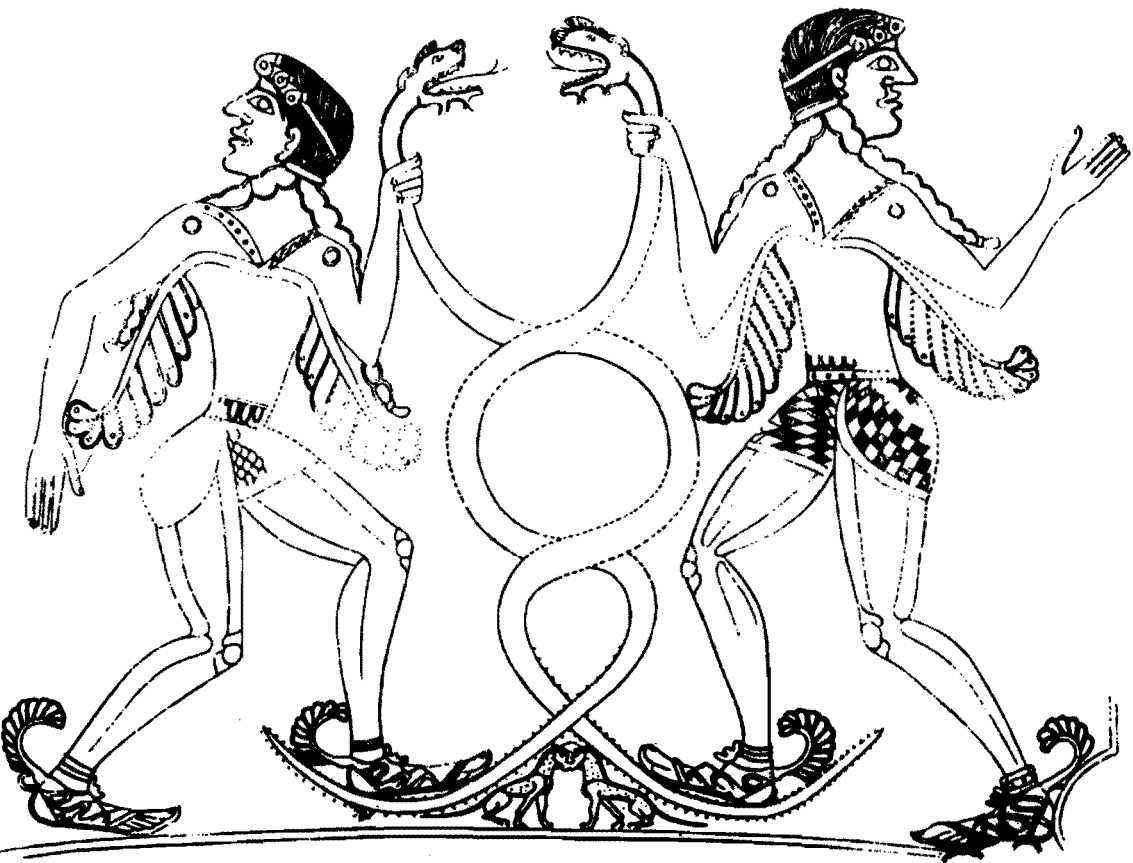
Another mythical being, whose meaning is lately being investigated by a number of researchers³⁸ and who is shown as possessing similar attributes (wings, serpents) is Gorgo. In the

oldest iconography his/her sex is undetermined³⁹, and this being is represented like a terrible strength, the control of which determines a superior power. His/her head surrounded by serpents in a number of images⁴⁰, his/her body entwined with reptiles (for example in the pediment of the temple of Artemis in Corcyra where the serpents form a girdle⁴¹ (*illustration 4 -*), Gorgo seems a candidate to symbolize among the Greeks the radical alterity named *Kundalini* in Tantric tradition, a terrific power mastered by a select group of special men, transformed into heroes.

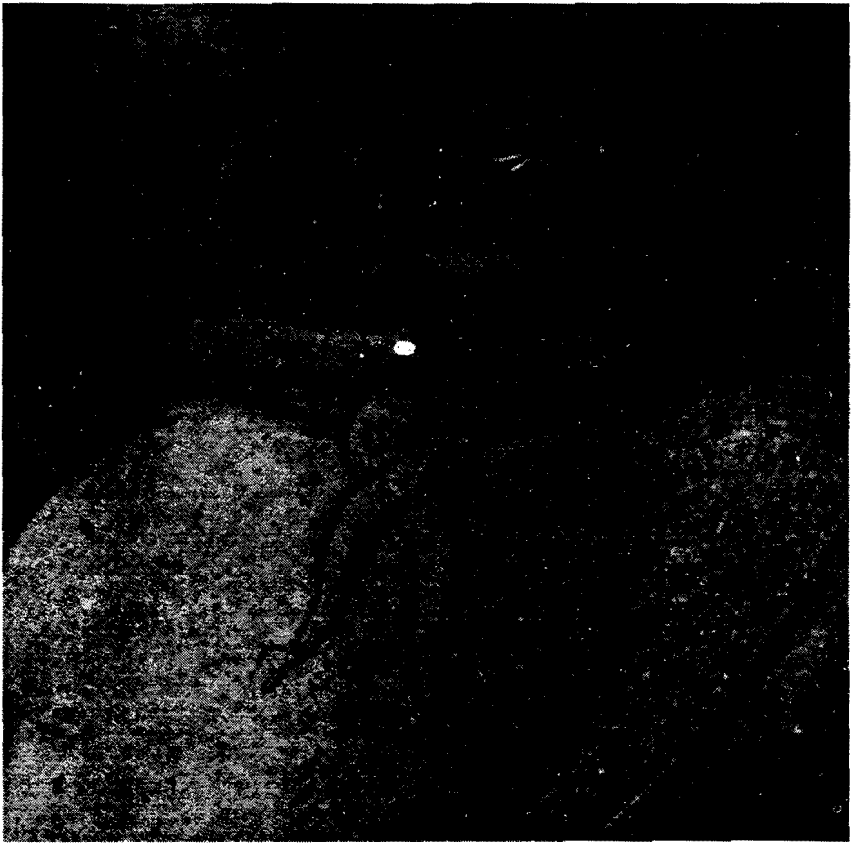
Thanks to the Indian parallel we can better understand the subtle role of Hermes, the god in the Greek pantheon who best symbolizes the ritual of ascension and change to a new reality that is the experimentation of serpentine power, the alterity and strength of which are reflected in the hypnotic and terrifying glance of Gorgo.

5) Conclusions

Among the Greeks a knowledge seems to be attested of subtle or mystical physiology having a number of elements comparable with Indian Tantrism. The symbols (serpent, light, ascension) and the experience (importance of sex, access to a greater personal development) are similar. In the Greek case the information is hidden in the mythical language (in the literary or iconographical transmission), re-elaborated and transmitted in most cases by authors who are unaware of the real dimension of the facts they are relating. Without the instruments of the comparative method the sole interest of the vicissitudes of diviners such as Teiresias, Melampous or Branchos, heroes like Perseus or gods like Hermes is to show the ravings of mythical creation; in the light of the Indian example, the Greek myth grows in meaning and could be explained, in part. It is hard to agree with the idea that both traditions draw on a common source (because of the paucity of documentation); and difficult to affirm that a lending relationship exists between both countries⁴² and cultures in the archaic period or even earlier;



3) Cretan bronze helmet. Norbert Schimmel Collection (New York)
(note 37)



4) Pediment of the temple of Artemis (Corcyra) Serpentine girdle of Gorgo
(note 41)

it seems more acceptable to defend that we are dealing with similar models to characterize extraordinary religious experiences. But the result is different and exemplifies the cultural adaptation produced in the social mentality in each country that seems to illustrate the archaism of the practices and permits us to refute a recent loan. Heroes, kings or diviners in the Greek case or creatures liberated from the bonds of human nature in the Indian case are two ways to represent the man who had developed potentialities beyond the reach of common human beings.

Notes & References

1. We follow a methodology of analysis completely different from Krappe, A.H. "Teiresias and the Snakes" *AJPH* 49, 1928, 267-275 in spite of the use of the Indian parallel in both approaches.
2. Hesiod fr. 261 M/W (Schol. Ap. Rhod. 11, 118-121); Apollod. I (96), 9, 11. The same means confer the gift of divination on Hellenos and Cassandra (cf. Schol. Hom. l. VII, 44); see Halliday, W.R. *Greek Divination*, Chicago, 1913, 83ff. The role of Melampous in the pseudo-hesiodic *Melampodia* (see Löffler, I., *Die Melampodie*, Meisenheim 1963 or Schwartz, J. *Pseudo-Hesiodica*, Leiden 1960, 227ff.) must have been essential but the fragments surviving (M/W 270-279) held no interest for our research.
3. For recent approaches, see Jost, M. "La légende de Mélampous en Argolide et au Péloponnèse" "in *BCH* suppl. 22, 1992, 172ff., Simon, E. "Melampous" in *LIMC* VI, 1992 405ff. (iconography); Scarpì, P. "Melampus e i miracoli di Dionysos" in *Perennitas. Studi Angelo Brelich*, Roma 1980, 431ff. and Suárez de la Torre, E. "Les pouvoirs des devins et les recits mythiques: l'exemple de Melampous" *LEC* LX, 1992, 3ff. Also Pley, R. in *RE* XV, l.s.v. or Wolff, O. in Roscher's *Lexikon* II, 2 s.v.
4. Dowden, K. *Death and the Maiden, Girls Initiation Rites in Greek Mythology*, London/New York, 1989, 71-115, he follows the ideas expressed by Burkert, W. *Homo Necans*, Berlin, 1972, 191-194 and *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*, London, 1979, 86-87.
5. The relationship between Melampous / Μελαμπόδιον (*Helleborus Orientalis Lam*) was quoted by Murr, J. *Die Pflanzenwelt in der griechischen Mythologie*, Innsbruck, 1890, 228, also Edmunds, L. "The Cults and Legend of Oedipus" *HSPH* 85, 1981, 221ff.

6. Version A in the catalogue of Brisson, L. *Le mythe de Tirésias*, Leiden, 1976, 12-21. The book of Brisson is the best analysis of the mythical diviner, also García Gual, C. "El adivino Tiresias o las desgracias del mediador" in *Mitos, Viajes, Héroe*s, Madrid 1981, 121ff.
7. Version B (Brisson). See also Loraux, N. "Ce que vit Tiresias" in *Les expériences de Tirésias*, Paris, 1989, 253-271. We do not take into account the aberrant version in Sostratos (32 F 7 Jacoby; *SHell.* II. 733, 352-353-Eustath. *Hom Od.* 10, 492-).
8. In the cases Ao2, 4, 6, 9, 10, and 11 (Brisson) the use of a staff is quoted, in the other versions Teiresias kills or wounds the serpents but no mention is made of the use of a sword (*contra* de Waele, F. J. M., *The Magic Staff or Rod in Graeco-Italian Antiquity*, Gent, 1927, 146ff).
9. See Boetzkes, R. *Das Kerykeion*, Giessen, 1913 (summed in RE 11, 1921, col. 330ff); de Waele, *op. cit.* (*supra* note 8) *passim*; Schouten, J., *The Rod and Serpent of Asclepius*, Amsterdam-London-New York, 1967, 177ff.; Preller, L., "Der Hermesstab" *Philologus* I, 1846, 516 ff.; Hoffmann, O. A. *Hermes und Kerykeion*, Marburg, 1890.
10. See Crome, J. F. "Kerykeia" *AM* 63/64, 1938/1939, 117ff.; Diez de Velasco, F., "Un aspecto del simbolismo del *kerykeion* de Hermes" *Gerion* 6, 1988, 39ff.; Siebert, G. "Hermes" In *LIMC*, V, 1990, 381ff. For the *Kerykeion* of the Norbert Schimmel Collection (New York) see Muscarella, O. W. (ed.) *Ancient Art. The Norbert Schimmel Collection*, Mainz, 1974, num. 28 (with bibliography, dated in the sixth or early fifth century BC).
11. " *petenti Apollini ut liceret se dicere inuenisse lyram, concessit, et ab eo uirgulam quandam muneri accepit. Quam manu tenens Mercurius, cum proficisceretur in Arcadiam et uidisset duos dracones inter se coniuncto corpore alium alium adpetere, ut qui dimicare inter se uiderentur, uirgulam in utrumque subiecit; itaque discesserunt. Quo facto, eam uirgulam pacis causa dixit esse constitutam. Nonnulli etiam, cum faciunt caduceos, duos dracones implicatos uirgula faciunt...*" (ed.) A. Le Boeuffe, Paris, (CUF), 1983, 34-35.
12. We follow the argumentation in Brisson, *op. cit.* (*supra* note 6) 55 who seems to have only one hypothetical iconographical confirmation (expecting the complete analysis in the *LIMC*-forthcoming-) in an Etruscan bronze vase in the Museo Archeologico of Arezzo (Brisson, *op. cit. supra* note 6 - fig. 10) with the representation of Teiresias and a staff with entwined serpents at the top.
13. See *infra* part 4.
14. 26 F 1 (33) Jacoby (Phot. Bibl. 186, 33)

15. See Eliade, M. *Méphisopheles et l' androgyne*, Paris, 1962, chap. 1.
16. We follow particularly the general surveys in Padoux, A. "Tantrism" in Eliade, M. (ed) *Encyclopaedia of Religion (ER)*, New York, 1987, vol. 14, 272-280; Eliade, M. *Le Yoga: immortalité et liberté*, Paris, 1964, chap. 6; Dasgupta, S. *Obscure Religious Cults*, Calcutta, 1963; Gupta, S. (et alii) *Hindu Tantrism*, Leiden, 1979 and Zimmermann, H. "Le Tantrisme. Origine et caractère d'un phénomène religieux" *Etudes de Lettres* 3, 1982, 11-43 (especially for the origins of Tantrism) and the editions of texts in Woodroffe, J. *Principles of Tantra*, Madras, 1913; id., *The Serpent Power*, Madras, 1928 and Id. *Sakti and Sakta* Madras, 1927, 3rd ed.
17. See Padoux, A. "Hindu Tantric Literature" in *ER* 6, 365-367 (including the translations in the major European languages and the main bibliography), the information is much more thorough in Kaviraj, G. *Tantrik Sahitya* (in Hindi), Lucknow, 1972.
18. See for example Daniélou, A. *Mythes et dieux de l' Inde*, Paris, 1992 (1975), 329ff. 387ff.; O'Flaherty, W.D. *Śiva: the Erotic Ascetic*, London, 1980 or Lorenzen, D.N. / Padoux, A. (et alii) "Śaivism" *ER* 13, 6-20.
19. Eliade, *op.cit.* (*supra* note 16), 199.
20. We follow particularly Woodroffe, *The Serpent Power* (*supra* note 16), *passim*, Padoux, A. "Cakra" in *ER* 3, 4-5; *id.* "Kuṇḍalinī" in *ER* 8, 402-403 and Silburn, L. *La kuṇḍalinī: l' 'énergie des profondeurs*, Paris, 1983.
21. Gupta, S. "Jivanmukti" in *ER* 8, 92-94.
22. On androgyny see O' Flaherty, W.D./Eliade, M. "Androgynes" in *ER* 1, 276-281; O' Flaherty, W.D. *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, Chicago, 1980 (sp. chap. V); Baumann, H. *Das doppelte Geschlecht*, Berlin, 1955; Eliade, M. *op.cit.* (*supra* note 15) chap. 2 or Delcourt, M. *Hermaphrodite. Mythes et rites de la bisexualité dans l' antiquité classique*, Paris, 1958 (chap. III on Teiresias).
23. The symbolism of the serpent is extremely complex and varied, see for example Lurker, M. "Snakes" *ER* 13, 370-374; *id.* *Adler und Schlange*, Tubingen, 1983; Mundkur, B. *The Cult of the Serpent*, Albany, 1983 (chap. 4 on sex and serpent) or Küster, E. *Die Schlange in der griechischen Kunst und Religion*, Giessen (RGVV 13, 2), 1933.
24. Eliade, *op. cit.* (*supra* note 15), chap. "lumière et maithuna" based on *Guhyasamāja Tantra*.
25. Sergent, B. *L' homosexualité dans la mythologie grecque*, Paris, 1984 especially chap. IV and *L' homosexualité' initiatique dans l' Europe ancienne*, Paris, 1986, define the role of homosexuality in the Greek class-age initiations, but do not go deeply into the meaning of the behaviour. Similarly, Bremmer, J. "An enigmatic Indo-European Rite: Paederasty" *Arethusa* 13, 1980, 279-298 or Cantarella, E. *Secondo natura*,

- Milan, 1988, chap. 1 (with a review of the different interpretations of the origin of Greek homosexuality from Bethe). See a previous attempt at explanation in Diez de Velasco, F. "Anotaciones a la iconografía y el simbolismo del laberinto en el mundo griego: el espacio de la iniciación" in Olmos, R. (ed.) *Teseo y la copa de Aison* (Anejo de AEA XII), 1992, 195-197.
26. Initiation as "rite de passage" and initiation as an access to knowledge of superior or mystical nature. On initiation in Greece see especially Jeanmaire, H. *Couroi et Courètes*, Lille, 1939; Brelich, A. *Paidés e Parthenoi*, Rome, 1969; Dowden, *op. cit.* (*supra* note 4); Sourvinou-Inwood, C. *Studies in Girls' Transitions*, Athens, 1988; Vernant, J.P./Vidal-Naquet, P. *La Grèce ancienne 3. Rites de passage et transgressions*, Paris, 1992 especially chap. 5 and chap. 8 or Dowden, K. *The Uses of Greek Mythology*, London/New York, 1992 chap. 7, 2, 110-118. More general Bianchi U. (ed.) *Transition Rites*, Rome 1986 (1984); Ries, J. *Les rites d'initiation*, Louvain 1986 (1984); *L'initiation* 2 vols. Montpellier 1992 (1991); Lévêque, P. *Les rites de passage dans l'antiquité* in *MEFRA* 102, 1990, 7-137. More bibliography on initiation over the world in Eliade, M. / Kaelber, W.O./Lincoln, B. "Initiation", *ER* 7, 224-238.
 27. See Siebert, *op. cit.* (*supra* note 10,) ils. 185ff.
 28. The major lines of these analysis were sketched in Diez de Velasco, F. "Un aspecto del simbolismo del *kerykeion* de Hermes" *Gerion* 6, 1988, 39ff.
 29. See Brown, N.O. *Hermes the Thief. The Evolution of a Myth*, Madison, 1947.
 30. See Eitrem, S. *Hermes und die Toten*, Christiania, 1909; Philippart, B. "Hermès, répartiteur des âmes" *RBPh* 1930, 549 ff.; Raingeart, P. *Hermès psychagogue* Paris, 1935; Kerényi, K. *Hermes, der Seelenführer*, Zurich, 1944 or Karouzo, S. ΕΡΜΕΣ ΨΥΧΟΠΟΜΠΟΣ " *AM* 76, 1961, 91-106.
 31. See Delcourt, M. *Hermaphrodite*, Paris, 1958 (chap. IV); *id.*, *Hermaphroditea*, Brussels, 1966 or Ajootian, A. "Hermaphroditos" in *LIMC* V, 1990, 268-285.
 32. See Marcadé, J. "Hermès doubles" *BCH* 76, 1952, 596ff.
 33. See the masterly analysis of Vernant, J.P. "Hestia-Hermès: sur l'expression religieuse de l'espace et du mouvement chez les Grecs" in *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs*, Paris, 1965, 124-170; enlarged in Kahn, L. *Hermès passe ou les ambiguïtés de la communication* Paris, 1978; *id.* "Hermès, la frontière et l'identité" *Ktéma* 4, 1979, 201 ff.
 34. See Costa, G. "Hermes dio delle iniziazioni" *CCC*, 3, 1982, 277ff. Hermes is the god who naturally ought to preside over an initiation in the way expressed *supra* in note 26.

35. Inv. 19159, Beazley, J. *Paralipomena* Oxford, 1971, 9, 11; Siebert, *op. cit.* (*supra* note 10), num., 230 (with illustration); Petrakos, B. *Musée National*, Athens, 1982, 167 il. 145.
36. Siebert, *op.cit.* (*supra* note 10), num. 230-240.
37. Muscarella, *op. cit.* (*supra* note 10), num. 15 (with illustration and bibliography). Burkert, W. *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*, Berkeley-London, 1979, 32, in a different way of research, marks the parallels with Mesopotamian images (e.g. the seal of Gudea in the Louvre - il. 1; p. 31, - other Near Eastern examples in Van Buren, E. D. "Entwined Serpents" *Archiv für Orientforschung* 10, 1935-36, 53ff.)
38. The most comprehensive approaches are Vernant, J.P. *La mort dans les yeux*, Paris, 1985, sp. chap. 3, 4, y 7;; *id.* "La figure des dieux I: Gorgô" in *Figures, idoles, masques*, Paris, 1991. Also Krauskopf. I. "Gorgo, Gorgones" in LIMC IV, 1988, 287 for more bibliography (in spite of the omission of a number of the works of the "Paris school") and iconography. See also the use of comparative method to explain Gorgo (in a different way from ours) in Gershenson, D. E. "The Beautiful Gorgon and Indo-European Parallels" *The Mankind Quarterly* 29, 1989, 373-390.
39. Krauskopf, *op. cit.* (*supra* note 38), num. 4ff. (with illustrations).
40. Examples in Krauskopf, *op.cit.* (*supra* note 38), num. 36, 45, 46, 67b, 156, 172, 234ff. (with illustrations).
41. Dated in 590 B.C. See Rodenwaldt, G. *Die Bildwerke des Artemistempels von Korkyra*, Berlin 1939; Krauskopf, *op. cit.* (*supra* note 37), num. 289.
42. Despite using the comparative method, the position followed in this paper differs completely from the diffusionist interpretations expressed for examples in Frothingham, A. L. "Babylonian origin of Hermes the snakegod and the caduceus" *AJA* 20, 1916, 175ff., or in Krappe, *op. cit.* (*supra* note 1).