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Rhesos of Thrace

Author(s): Walter Leaf

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## RHESOS OF THRACE.

ACROSS the fascinating, if somewhat flamboyant, pictures of the *Doloneia* there shoots a meteor like Goethe's *Sternschuppe*:—

Aus der Höhe schoss ich her  
Im Stern- und Feuerscheine,  
Liege nun im Grase quer:  
Wer hilft mir auf die Beine?

Rhesos appears in shining armour—or rather, we are told that he appears, for we never see him or hear him. We learn only that on the very night of his entry into the Trojan ranks he is slain in his sleep without a blow. His entry has not been prepared, his exit is forgotten; there is no word of him before or after the tenth book of the *Iliad*.

He can, indeed, hardly be called a person at all. He is a suit of armour labelled with a name, no more. He comes from 'Thrace'—a sufficiently vague term, meaning no more than 'the north.' He has a father Eioneus, 'Shoreman.'<sup>1</sup> But he has not even a city. He is located nowhere in the wide stretch of shore between the Pontic Sea and the mouth of the Axios. The western part of this region is indeed to Homer the country of the Paionians and Kikones; the Thracians are, it would seem, confined to the eastern part, just north of the Hellespont; the only

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<sup>1</sup> *Ἠϊονεύς* is a stock name in mythology. In Homer it is given to an otherwise unknown Greek in *Il.* vii. 11: to a grandson of Aiolos in Paus. vi. 21, 11: to a son of Proteus, grandfather of Hekabe, in Pherekydes ap. schol. Eur. *Hec.* 3: to the father of Dia wife of Ixion, in schol. Ap. Rhod. iii. 62. There is thus little ground for connecting it with the Strymon, because there was at the mouth of the river a town *Ἠϊών*. That is merely the name given by Greek traders to the 'beach' at which they traded before Amphipolis was founded. There were indeed two other places so called in

Thrace and Macedonia, according to Eustathios and Steph. Byz. The name is little more than the modern 'Scala.' Thus when Konon says that *Ἠϊονεύς* was the ancient name of the Strymon, we must needs be incredulous; the assertion is patently a conjecture to reconcile the genealogy of Homer with that of the *Rhesus*. Had there been any ground for so interesting and important an identification, we should certainly have heard of it from some of the reputable authors who dealt with Greek geography and genealogy

Thracian town of which we hear is Ainos. So far then as Rhesos can be given a Homeric home, it must be somewhere in the Hebros valley.<sup>2</sup> In his case the question *πόθι τοι πόλις ἠδὲ τοκῆς* is at best half answered; Rhesos is a drifting shadow unplaced, cut off from all local ties, without any bonds to cult or myth. Of divine parentage there is no hint; he is a man so far as he has any real existence. In short, he proclaims himself a poetic fiction, created only for the purpose of supplying an effective object for the night attack of Diomedes and Odysseus. Indeed it might even be said that it is not he, but his white Thracian steeds, which take the first place; he is there only to introduce them and his Thracian panoply. He is called a Thracian only because Thrace was famed for white horses and armour.

This vagueness of outline, this emptiness of content, is evidently the cause of the neglect which, one notable exception apart, was his fate in subsequent literature. Why he should have been made the central figure in the enigmatical Attic tragedy named after him is the main problem with which we have hereafter to deal. If we leave it out of sight for the moment, the only appearances of Rhesos in Greek literature, so far as I know, date from long subsequent days. The romancer Parthenios devotes the last chapter of his work to the tale of the wooing of the huntress maiden Arganthonē of Kios in Bithynia by Rhesos, 'before he went to Troy.'<sup>3</sup> It is a simple love-story which might have been told of any pair. In Philostratos<sup>4</sup> he appears in a totally different light. He is a sort of wild huntsman on Rhodope; the wild beasts come to his hero-shrine to offer themselves in willing sacrifice.

The thing that strikes one about all these stories is the absence of any common bond of locality or legend. In the drama the home of Rhesos, vaguely defined by Homer as Thrace, is on the banks of the Strymon, which to Homer is probably in the land not of the Thracians but the Paionians. In Parthenios he is brought to Bithynia; the locality is fixed by the name of the maiden Arganthonē, derived from Mount Arganthonios over Kios. His presence there is explained by his travels in many countries 'in collecting tribute,' and in particular by the reputation of the beautiful huntress, a local Atalanta. In Philostratos we are taken back to Thrace, but to Rhodope, not to the Strymon.

The legendary element of the story varies no less. The play abandons the parentage ascribed to Rhesos by Homer; his father is no longer Eioneus, but the river-god Strymon; and he is moreover provided with a divine mother in 'the Muse.'<sup>5</sup> Parthenios knows nothing of any divine parentage;

<sup>2</sup> Hipponax, fr. 39 (42) actually names Ainos as his home:

*ἐπ' ἀρμάτων τε καὶ Θρηκίῳν πόλων  
λευκῶν ἰὼν κατ' ἐγγύς Ἰλίου πύργων  
ἀπηνάρισθη Ῥήσος Αἰνίων πάλμυς.*

(MS. *Αἰνειῶν*, corr. Brink.) Cf. *Troy*, p. 271. So in Serv. on *Aen.* i. 469 he is made the son

of the Hebros.

<sup>3</sup> Parth. 36 (*Erotici Gr.*, Teubner ed., p. 32).

<sup>4</sup> *Her.* 681.

<sup>5</sup> That there was no fixed tradition about his mother appears from the choice given by later authors between Terpsichore, Kleio, Kalliope and Euterpe; Roscher, *Lex.* iv. pp. 106-7.

the lovers are both human. In Philostratos the Homeric story is entirely abandoned, and Rhesos has taken on the character of saga.

The natural conclusion is that the Rhesos of the *Doloneia* is a purely literary creation of the moment, devoid of local or legendary background. The slightness of the outline accounts for the small impression which this fictitious character produced on later literature; the person of Rhesos was brought upon the Attic stage for some special reason, but was treated with complete freedom from any ties of legend, and elsewhere forgotten, till the late romance writers, foraging in the records of the past, took him as a peg on which to hang unappropriated stories.

There is not even any ground for supposing, as some have done, that Rhesos is a genuine Thracian name. The sole ground for such a supposition is the appearance in Philostratos of a distinct Rhesos-saga. That evidence is too late and untrustworthy for any conclusions; it is not confirmed by the only recurrence of the name as that of a river in the Troad.<sup>6</sup> And to suppose that Rhesos is a Thracian word for 'king,' connected with *rex*, seems a curious recrudescence of pre-scientific etymology.

This modest and natural view of Rhesos naturally does not suit the mythologist. He starts with the maxim—quite unproved, and no more than a guess—that every Greek hero, and therefore Rhesos, is a 'faded god.' We are not therefore surprised to find that so eminent a scholar as Erwin Rohde has a great deal to tell us about Rhesos.<sup>7</sup> He is, it appears, 'a tribal god (Stammgott) of the Edonians, of the same type as the Zalmoxis of the Getai, the Sabos or Sabazios of other Thracian stems.' 'The district at the mouth of the Strymon, on the western slopes of Pangaios, is the old home of Rhesos . . . He dwells on Pangaios as an oracular god.' This theory seems to have been accepted as a matter of course by subsequent writers of the same school;<sup>8</sup> yet it is eminently worth a closer examination.

It is not often that we can bring the faded god to book by direct evidence; he is generally no more than a precarious deduction from unwarranted assumptions. In the case of Rhesos, as it happens, we have such direct evidence; and it contradicts Dr. Rohde in the most emphatic way. It is the evidence of an expert in religion who, though he never had the advantage of sitting at the feet of Prof. Usener, had access to evidence far more abundant than can be at the disposal of the most learned of modern scholars. It is not an *obiter dictum*, but the deliberate judgment of a man who is carefully considering the very point at issue.

Cicero, in his treatise on theology, discusses the conditions which led to the deification of heroes. It is not enough, he says, that the hero should be of divine parentage; though Achilles, for instance, is in Astypalaea worshipped as a god, it is not because he is son of a goddess. For there are other heroes who are equally sons of goddesses, yet are not worshipped. And as instances he quotes—Orpheus and Rhesos. They are both children

<sup>6</sup> *Il.* xii. 20.

<sup>7</sup> *Psyche*, p. 151, note 2.

<sup>8</sup> *E.g.* Bethe *s.v.* 'Diomedes' in Pauly-Wissowa, v. 818; Pfister, *Religionskult.*, p. 198.

of goddesses, yet neither of them enjoys divine worship.<sup>9</sup> Could there be more explicit evidence?

'Perhaps they were not so worshipped in Cicero's day,' Rohde somewhat feebly argues: 'but that is no evidence for earlier times.' He appears to forget that Cicero is speaking generally—that he represents the learning of his day, not his own personal knowledge. 'They are not worshipped anywhere' means that the Alexandrine theologians who had collected the materials on which he bases his assertions knew of no instance of the worship of Rhesos; and that takes us back at least to the fifth century B.C.; so far at least Alexandrian evidence could go. And this, on any assumption, covers the tragedy of Rhesos. We are safe in concluding from Cicero's words not only that the Alexandrines knew of no worship of Rhesos, but that they did not consider the tragedy as evidence of such worship.

This brings us to the gist of the problem, the evidence on which Rohde founds his theory, the theophany of the tragedy of *Rhesus* attributed to Euripides. It will be worth while to give an abstract of the whole scene, 890–996.

The Muse appears, wailing over the body of her dead son Rhesos, and cursing Diomedes and Odysseus who have slain him by stealth. It is the son of Philammon, Thamyris, who has been the cause of her grief; for it was on her way to the famous contest where, with her sister-Muses, she outsang Thamyris and blinded his eyes, that she fell in with the river-god Strymon, and, yielding to his wooing, became the mother of Rhesos. She gave the babe to his father, who in turn entrusted him to the river-nymphs; Rhesos grew up to be king of Thrace. She foresaw disaster if Rhesos should go to Troy, but he had yielded to the prayers of Hector, and so had met his death. 'And of all this woe,' she continues, 'Athena is guilty. It was not the doing of Odysseus or Diomedes; do not think that I am deluded. And yet, Athena, it is thy city which we sister-Muses honour above all; we haunt the place, and Orpheus, the cousin of him whom thou hast slain, is he who displayed the torches of the hidden mysteries; it was Phoibos and we, his kindred band, who equipped thy revered citizen Musaios, so that he should pass in solitary grandeur to the foremost place of men. And my recompense for all this is that I have to mourn over the dead body of my son. I am content with Musaios as my advocate, and need call in no other skilled pleader to speak on my behalf.'<sup>10</sup>

Here the chorus interrupt to express their satisfaction at learning that the death of Rhesos was not due to Hector; and Hector, after

<sup>9</sup> Itaque Achillen Astypalaeenses insulani sanctissime colunt. Qui si deus est, et Orpheus et Rhesus dii sunt, Musa matre nati: nisi forte maritimae nuptiae terrenis anteponuntur. Si hi dii non sunt, quia nusquam coluntur, quo modo illi sunt? Vide igitur ne uirtutibus hominum isti honores habeantur, non immor-

talitatibus.—*De Nat. D.* iii. 45.

<sup>10</sup> This I take to be the meaning of the last clause, σοφιστήν δ' ἄλλον οὐκ ἐπάξομαι. I cannot help fancying that it contains an allusion to debates in the Assembly at Athens on the Amphipolis question.

acknowledgment, expresses his intention of preparing a tomb for Rhesos and burning with the body a wealth of raiment.

The Muse answers, 'He shall not pass beneath the earth; I will at least ask Persephone, daughter of Demeter, to send his soul up again. She owes me a debt, she is bound to honour the friends of Orpheus. For me, indeed, he will be henceforth as one that is dead and sees not the light; for never will he come where I am, nor behold his mother's face. But he shall lie hidden in caves of the silver land, a spirit-man (*ἀνθρωποδαίμων*) beholding the light, even as the spokesman of Bacchos came to dwell in Pangaïos' rock, a god venerable to those who know.' The speech ends with a prophecy of Achilles' death, which is soon to happen.

This remarkable passage is so full of matter that one hardly knows where to begin. But we may first point out that, far from supporting Rohde and his Stammgott, it decisively contradicts him. The home of Rhesos is not on Pangaïos at all; he is a stranger there. Pangaïos is the home of Bacchos. A spokesman (*προφήτης*) of Bacchos has already come there to dwell with the god; Rhesos shall do the same. Rhesos is in fact a new-comer in the second degree. And he is not to be a god; on the contrary, his godhead is denied in double fashion. First by the curious and unique compound *ἀνθρωποδαίμων*, which seems purposely designed to exclude the divine. The simple *δαίμων* might imply godhead; any such implication is effectively excluded by the addition of the manhood in the emphatic place. And secondly by the words used of his predecessor the 'spokesman.' The *προφήτης* is a subordinate of Bacchos. He is indeed recognized as a god by 'those who know,' those who are initiated in the mysteries; but the outer world remains in ignorance. Yet even this modified divinity is not allowed to Rhesos. If he is indeed a Stammgott of the Edonians, he is most mercilessly degraded from his honours, and the statement of Cicero receives complete confirmation.<sup>11</sup>

Let us now turn to the passage as a whole. One thing at least is clear; the plain intention is to bring the city of Athens into intimate connexion with Rhesos. The whole blame of Rhesos' death is laid upon the goddess, and through her on her citizens. Athens is partner in an evil deed for which reparation is due, in mere gratitude for all that the Muses have done for Athens. And the connexion is made through one quite special link—the relation of Orpheus to the Eleusinian Mysteries. It must have seemed at first sight almost impossible to connect the Thracian Rhesos of Homer with the city; the manner in which it is effected is highly ingenious.

It is a certain fact that Orphism had, early in the fifth century or

<sup>11</sup> Possibly Rohde is one of those who read *ὄστε* for *ὥστε* in 972 (*Βάκχου προφήτης ὥστε Παγγαίου πέτραν ἔκησε σεμνὸς τοῖσιν εἰδόσιν θεός*), thus identifying the spokesman with

Rhesos himself. This seems to me impossible, not on any grammatical ground, but because the aorist *ἔκησε* is dramatically unthinkable as part of the prophecy.

not long before it, been formally adopted into the Dionysos-Demeter cycle of mysteries, to which it was originally strange.<sup>12</sup> Orpheus had 'displayed the torches,' *φανὰς ἔδειξε*, of Bacchos at Eleusis; this implies that he had also been taken into partnership with Bacchos at headquarters, at the Mount Pangaios whence the Bacchic worship had so widely radiated. That Orpheus is in fact the *Βάκχου προφήτης* who went to live on Pangaios, as Maass has argued, seems to me to be beyond all reasonable doubt. It follows from the whole tenor of the passage, and any other interpretation would be of necessity unintelligible.<sup>13</sup>

We have then reached this point; that the city of Athens is under an obligation, resting on the most elementary considerations of gratitude, to repair a great wrong done to the Muses. The reparation required is that Rhesos shall be taken back to his home on the banks of his father's river, the Strymon; there he is to be honoured much as Orpheus is honoured, though hardly with so high a rank. The means by which this is to be done is through the goddess of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Persephone, owing the Muses a debt for the aid which Orpheus has given at Eleusis, will be willing to give up the soul of Rhesos for the purpose. This is put in the form first of a strong statement of the obligation, then of a prophecy that the restitution will be made. And the prophecy received in fact such a striking fulfilment that we are quite safe in saying that it was composed after the event.

Greece had early in the fifth century begun to cast longing eyes on the mouth of the Strymon, the gate into the rich plains and richer mines of eastern Macedonia and their potentialities of wealth. But the land was held by the powerful and independent tribe of the Edonians, and two attempts to found a colony there had already failed disastrously before the attacks of the warlike natives. The first had come from Miletos in 497, the second was a combination under Athenian leadership in 465-4.<sup>14</sup> The third and successful attempt was made by the Athenians, under the leading of Hagnon in 437; and the city of Amphipolis was duly founded.

After two failures, very special religious precautions had of course to be taken; and an oracle advised that to ensure proper protection from the other world the bones of Rhesos should be brought and duly installed in the new colony. Among the graves which were shown by the *ciceroni* of Troy was, of course, that of Rhesos. An expedition was accordingly sent which broke into this grave by night, embarked the bones there found, and carried them to Amphipolis. In the heart of the new town Rhesos was buried in a hero's tomb, and no doubt worshipped with the

<sup>12</sup> See Miss Harrison, *Prolegomena*, ch. v.

<sup>13</sup> It seems to me beside the question to argue against Maass, as Perdrizet does, on questions of local Pangaian mythology and geography. I do not see the least ground for supposing that the author of the *Rhesus* knew

anything about such matters; that Orpheus went to live at Pangaios only means that he was adopted into the Dionysiac system at a place which for the particular purpose is highly convenient.

<sup>14</sup> Thuc. iv. 102; Herod. vii. 114.

usual heroic rites. Opposite his tomb, we are told, was a shrine of his mother the Muse, later identified with Klio.<sup>15</sup>

The story comes from a late author, Polyainos,<sup>16</sup> and one who is no trustworthy historian; but in this case, as Rohde himself says, there is not the least reason for doubting it. The oracles in the fifth century were fond of giving orders for the transference of the bones of heroes to their native places, in order to assure their protection. There is one certainly datable case in which the Athenians themselves had been concerned only a short time before. An oracle directed in 476 that the bones of Theseus should be brought from Skyros and solemnly laid in the Theseion. The action had been a brilliant success; Athens had rapidly risen to the height of her power. But if the oracle had to find, and to recommend to Athens, a Thracian hero who had died away from his own land, and whose grave was known so that his bones could be repatriated, it would seem that the choice was singularly limited. Thrace was at this time very little known at Athens; no Thracian heroes, so far as we know, had played a part in Greek history, save in the Trojan War. And even here there were but few. Asteropaios would not serve, for he was son of the river Axios, so it was not possible to pretend that his home was on the Strymon, where the new colony was to be founded. Peiroos, one of the leaders of the Thracians in the Trojan Catalogue, was from Ainos, too far east, even if he was important enough to have his tomb still shown at Troy. Euphemos, captain of the Kikones, might have served; but he was too insignificant, and it is not even said that he went through the necessary formula of being slain. We are in fact reduced to Rhesos or nobody. Rhesos came from Thrace; the name is vague enough; why not make him the son of the river Strymon? Homer says, indeed, that he is son of Eioneus; but it is only respectable for the son of a river-god to have a human father<sup>17</sup> as well. The Homeric paternity can easily be recognized in the name of Eion, the sea-side town which will serve as the port of Amphipolis. The tomb of Rhesos is one of the sights of Troy, and no one claims him elsewhere; so let Rhesos be the patron of the settlement, and let his bones

<sup>15</sup> Marsyas ap. schol. Eur. *Rhes.* 347.

<sup>16</sup> *Strat.* vi. 53. I quote the whole passage, so far as it refers to Rhesos. "Αγνων Ἀττικὴν ἀποικίαν ἤγαγεν οἰκίσαι βουλόμενος τὰς καλουμένας Ἐννέα ὁδοὺς ἐπὶ τῷ Στρυμόνι· ἦν γὰρ καὶ λόγιον Ἀθηναίοις τοῖόνδε·

τίπτε νέως (?) κτίσσαι πολὺπον μενεαίνετε  
χῶρον,  
κοῦροι Ἀθηναίων; χαλεπὸν δὲ θεῶν ἔτερ ἕμιν.  
οὐ γὰρ θέσφατόν ἐστι, πρὶν ἂν κομισῆτ' ἀπὸ  
Τροίης

Ῥήσου ἀνευρόντες καλᾶμην πατρίην δέ τ' ἀρούρη  
κρύψητ' εὐαγέως· τότε δ' ἂν τότε κῦδος ἄρισθε.

ταῦτα τοῦ θεοῦ χρῆσαντος ὁ στρατηγὸς Ἀγνων ἐς  
Τροίην ἔπεμψεν ἄνδρας οἱ τὸ Ῥήσου σῆμα νύκτωρ

ἀνορύξαντες ἀνέλκοντο τὰ δῶτᾶ· καὶ καταθέντες τὰ  
δῶτᾶ ἐς χλαμύδα πορφύραν κομίζουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν  
Στρυμόνα. οἱ μὲν δὴ κατέχοντες βάρβαροι τὴν  
χώραν διαβαίνειν τὸν ποταμὸν ἐκάλουν, Ἀγνων δὲ  
σπονδὰς ποιησάμενος τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀπέπεμψε τοὺς  
βαρβάρους καὶ διὰ τῆς νυκτὸς τὸν Στρυμόνα μετὰ  
τοῦ στρατεύματος διελθὼν τὰ τε δῶτᾶ τοῦ Ῥήσου  
κατάρυξε παρὰ τὸν ποταμὸν καὶ τὸ χωρίον ἀποτα-  
φρεύσας ἐτείχιζε πρὸς τὴν σελήνην, ἡμέρας δὲ  
οὐκ εἰργάζοντο. Rohde, followed by Jessen in  
Roscher's *Lexikon*, thinks that though the  
narrative is true, the details may be 'fabelhaft  
ausgeschmückt.' I should have thought the  
story was matter-of-fact and bald enough to  
suit the austere taste.

<sup>17</sup> See *Il.* xvi. 174–178.



be taken there to ensure the presence of the hero-spirit. There is not the least reason for supposing that the Edonians had ever heard of Rhesos—indeed it is extremely unlikely that they had. If he is not, as seems probable, a creation of the fertile brain of the author of the *Doloneia*, he may possibly have been, on the high authority of Philostratos, a name from Eastern Thrace, or, if we prefer the romancer Parthenios, from Bithynia. That he was a tribal god is the fancy of another and more modern romancer.

We are now in a position which enables us to draw the natural, and to me inevitable, conclusion. The tragedy of *Rhesus* was a *pièce d'occasion*; and the occasion was the founding of Amphipolis. It is a political piece, intended to encourage the expedition. The *Rhesus* was written in the year 437, or very near it.

A poet does not go out of his way to accuse his own city and its revered goddess of base ingratitude for favours received unless he has some very special grounds. The process by which the charge is manufactured is very elaborate and artificial. It is not easy at first sight to see how such an accusation can be founded on the killing of Rhesos as described in the *Iliad*. Athena takes part in it, but it is no reproach to her that she should help in the slaying of an enemy who is actually at war with her own Greeks. But the poet is equal to the occasion. He provides the necessary link by making Rhesos the son of 'the Muse.' For this, so far as we can tell, he had no authority in legend; the whole story proclaims itself as poetic fiction.

The Muses lived not in Thrace but in Pieria. But there was a good precedent, in the case of Orpheus, for making a Thracian son of a Muse. The poet sets about bringing the Muses to Thrace, and for this purpose employs the story of Thamyras, transplanting it from the Peloponnesos, where the Catalogue of the Greek ships had placed it, to Thamyras' home—the author of the *Boeotia* knew that Thamyras was a Thracian.<sup>18</sup> The Muses on their way thither from Pieria are bound to cross the Strymon; the tale of the divine paternity of Rhesos is invented, and he is fixed to the neighbourhood of Amphipolis.

When this is done, the next step, though not very convincing, is easy. Rhesos, the son of the Muse, is first cousin (*ἀντρανεψιός*) to Orpheus; and Orpheus has been adopted into the Eleusinian Mysteries; that is, he has been adopted by Athens.<sup>19</sup> Or rather, the Muses have adopted Athens, and conferred upon that favoured city all the glory of the highest mysteries—above all, the glory of Musaios, the Muses' Man, who is to the mystic the type of mankind exalted to spiritual heights beyond all his fellows. And the reward of all this unspeakable grace to Athens is that Athens, in the person of her patron goddess, ingloriously slays, by treacherous

<sup>18</sup> *Il.* ii. 595.

<sup>19</sup> This was a comparatively recent achievement, and fresh in men's minds; it had prob-

ably taken place under the Peisistratidai.  
—Miss Harrison, *Prolegomena*, p. 473.

guile, the beloved son of one of the kindly sisterhood. Can there be a more base ingratitude?

All this elaborate fiction has been invented in order that an injurious and wholly gratuitous attack may be made on the national honour of Athens and her goddess. That sort of thing is not done unless the solution is patent to every hearer. And in this case the solution is clear. The apparent attack is made in order to lay a solemn obligation on the Athenian state. If they have done the wrong, it is their business to repair it; and that is a thing to say at the moment when the reparation is actually being made.

It is not likely that the Athenians or any Greeks of the time felt much compunction at renewing their attacks on a gallant and independent people in order to possess themselves of valuable silver mines; still a religious sanction would not be out of place there, as it has been found useful under similar circumstances at later periods in history—by the Spaniards in America, for instance, not to deal with later events. But there was the story of the body-snatching by night at Troy. That was not a very pretty story at first sight; but it takes on an entirely different aspect when we learn that it is really done by divine order. The earth has given up its dead because the Muse has asked her friend Persephone in Attica to yield up the soul of the hero, which goes of course with his bones. The whole transaction is placed under the divinities of the mystic circle, now combined into one—Demeter, Bacchos, Orpheus. The recent admission of Orpheus is made a reason for hinting that Rhesos himself may be admitted into the holy corporation; at all events he is being taken into the region of Pangaïos, where Orpheus has lately been adopted. The newcomer may hope for an elevation like that of his cousin, though indeed this is barely hinted at. All that is promised is what is certainly possible for the state; he will dwell in a cave, an *ἄντρον*, like any other hero; and like any other hero duly worshipped, though he is beneath the earth, he will be kept in a sort of life, 'seeing the light,' by the due heroic sacrifices, the food and drink poured down through a hole upon his resting place. But he will certainly never be received among the gods; to his goddess-mother he will be as dead:—

*κάμοι μὲν ὡς θανάων τε κοῦ λεύσσω φάος  
ἔσται τὸ λοιπόν· οὐ γὰρ ἐς ταῦτόν ποτε  
οὔτ' εἶσιω οὔτε μητρὸς ὄψεται δέμας.*

How could any sort of post mortem divinity be denied in stronger terms? 'He will never come to the place' where the gods are, nor can even a goddess go to him.

I have said that the *Rhesus* must have been written in 437. Perhaps a little latitude must be allowed. But it is clear that it cannot have been written after the surrender of Amphipolis to Brasidas in 424. One thing is quite certain—that no Athenian could have witnessed the *Rhesus* after that date without intolerable feelings of shame and humiliation.

The reference, even if not intentional, was too obvious to escape the notice of the dullest patriot; and one would not be surprised if we were told that the author of the play had, after that great national disaster, done his best to disclaim the words in which he had so boldly asserted the divine favour under which the ill-starred exploit was carried out.

But it is not impossible that the play may have been written a little before 437. We are told that the oracle under which the bones of Theseus were taken from Skyros to Athens was given in 476; the actual conquest of the island and repatriation of the bones seems to have been effected only seven years later, in 469 or 468.<sup>20</sup> Possibly an interval may have occurred here also. Clearly the play cannot have been written before the oracle was given; but so large an expedition must have demanded long and careful preparation, and it is only due to the credit of the Athenian state to suppose that they negotiated for the voluntary return of the bones by the Trojan authorities before they had resort to the discreditable and sacrilegious step of breaking open the tomb by night. The play may well have been composed in preparation for the actual events of 437, and in order to give a religious gloss to these negotiations.

This conclusion of course is quite consistent with the theory that the *Rhesus* is an early play of Euripides: but it cannot be a youthful, and hardly even an immature, play. If it was written in 437, it is only a year later than the *Alcestis*, the earliest survivor; it is quite possible that it may be two or three years earlier, but hardly more. And the circumstances of its composition may go far to explain the peculiarities of its style and construction.

It is a play written for a special purpose, and the materials are very limited. Rhesos is one of the late comers into the Epos, and it is clear that his name had never been taken up by the popular myth-makers who, in every other case known to us, had transmuted the Homeric tales into the form, often distorted, which the Tragedians found most suited for their purpose. The author of the *Rhesus* has no source for his story save Homer and his own imagination. He is strictly limited by Homer till he reaches his theophany; then he is quite unrestricted. These are conditions unknown elsewhere. And he is working under strictly hieratic influence—he has to appear as a champion of the Mysteries in their most official and conventional aspect—to represent them as guiding infallibly a piece of state policy. One can hardly imagine Euripides writing quite like himself under these limitations.<sup>21</sup> But these considerations I leave to the experts in tragedy to decide.

One point, however—to return to the theme with which I began—I hope to have made out; that there is no foundation whatever in the theophany of the *Rhesus* for the idea of Rhesos as a tribal god of the

<sup>20</sup> Frazer, *Paus.* vol. ii. p. 164.

<sup>21</sup> Miss Harrison reminds me that Euripides had an ancestral interest in mystic rites; he

was born at Phlya, which had curious Orphic mysteries of its own. See her *Prolegomena*, Pref. p. xii. and 641–646.

Edonians. The evidence points conclusively in the other direction. He was a hero brought to the Strymon in the year 437 for a special purpose, and it must be added that he was a complete failure. Curiously enough, though we do hear one thing about the local worship of Amphipolis, Rhesos is not concerned in it. On the death of Brasidas the Amphipolitans transferred to him the rites paid to Hagnon as the founder of the city.<sup>22</sup> Probably that was the end of any regard to the discredited hero of the *Doloneia*. His honours lasted for thirteen years, and it was true, for four centuries before Cicero said it, that 'he is nowhere worshipped.' He was probably never taken very seriously even by the Athenians; and when they had no further interest in him, the less said about him the better.

WALTER LEAF.

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<sup>22</sup> Thuc. v. 11.