

GREEK MYTHOLOGICAL HORSES AND THE WORLD'S BOUNDARY

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Greek mythological horses, like Pegasus, Arion, Xanthus, Skyphius and others, show direct and indirect connection with water of any kind. This particular connection between horses and water would not stem from the notions of vegetation and fertility, but from the idea that water is the border between the world of the living and the Otherworld. The horse was psychopompos who carried the soul of the deceased across the border, and he also carried the shaman during his ecstatic journey.

Key words: horses, water, sources, Poseidon, Arion, Pegasus, Xanthus, Balius, Skiphius, Skironites, Kyllarus, Erichthonius' horses, shamanism

The catalogue of the Greek horses is tightly connected with rivers, springs, and wells - water of any kind - and with the river divinities*. The general notion was that the connection stemmed from the idea of water as giver of life, especially of plant life, and that horses were symbols of the vegetation deities. That is certainly true of some situations, notably of Indo-European horse-sacrifice. But when we look at the distinguished Greek horses, those with names and "personal" histories, the picture is quite different. The role of the horse as psychopompos in Greek and Roman traditions has been recognized for a very long time now, but connecting anonymous psychopompoi with distinguished horses, wells and rivers, and "vegetation" deities, represented a problem. On the level of verbalized stories they seemed different, but on the structural level there might be a connection.

In the ancient Greece horses and springs were frequently identified, and usually the blow of horse's hoof could open the source of water, as was the case of the spring *Hippoukrene* (Horse's spring) on the

mountain Helicon. Not far from *Hippoukrene* was another horse's spring — *Aganippe* — (Hes. Th. 6). Another *Hippoukrene* was in Troezen (Paus. 2.31), and in Ephesus was the source known as *Kallipia* (Plin. NH 5.115). A source named *Híppê* (after one of the Danaids) or *Hippeion* was situated near Argos (Callim. Fr. 66.8). We also have information of the river *Híppos* near the town Dioscurias in the land of Colchis (Arrian, *Periplous Ponti Euxini* 16) (Malten 1914, 185-186; Nilsson 1961, 11-12; Dietrich 1965, 129; Billot 1997, 47).

Also known as the "Source opener" (Quellöffner), was of course, the god Poseidon (Nilsson 1963, 121). He was the first to open a source on the Athenian Acropolis with his trident and the whole story of the struggle between Poseidon and Athena for the supremacy in Attica is in fact the story about the well on the Acropolis and the rituals connected with dew and humidity (Nyman 1980). In fact a more recent theory abandons the traditional etymology of Poseidon's name, as stemming from the pre-IE root *da-, meaning

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“earth”, and proposes the etymology from the IE root *da- meaning “running water”, and consequently that Poseidon was the “Source of Waters” god of the IE origin (Littleton 1973; Burkert 1990, 138). In accordance with these notions of Poseidon, he was considered master and progenitor of many Greek mythological horses — *híppios pontomédôn ánaks* (Aesch. Sept. 131) (Braarvig 1997, 348).

Hesychius (s.v. *Hippeios*) said that Poseidon had created three horses, *Skyphios*, *Arion* and *Pegasos*. Paulus Diaconus (101 M) wrote that Poseidon *Hippios* created the first horse *Skýphios* by striking the earth with his trident (cf. Schol. Apoll. Rhod. 3. 1244). That is comparable to the situation when he created the source on the Acropolis in the same way. Thessalian myth (Schol. Pind. Pyth. 4.246) tells that Poseidon, while sleeping, impregnated a rock in Thessaly and from it sprang or was born the first horse *Skýphios*. He shows many similarities with the horse Arion, so much so that he was considered as *Doppelgänger* of Arion. His first owner (as in the case of Arion) was Kopreus, and Adrastos the third (Tümpel 1895, 623). This horse has got a name after a physical defect. According to Xenophon (De re equestr. 7-10) his name means *hippos kyphagôgôs*, “with distorted neck”. Similar physical defect had *Kyllaros*, the horse of the Dioscuri, *kyllôs* meaning “distorted, a cripple”. The rock appears also in the story of how Poseidon fell asleep on the Attic hill Kolonos Hippios and had an emission of semen, and from that rock sprang his offspring, the horse *Skirônítês* or *Skýphios* (Schol. Lycophr. 766) (Nagy 1973, 146; Eljnickij 1983, 109). These two short reports bring forth some basic structures (see the **Table of motivems**):

Horse + rock + state of unconsciousness + (implied) physical defect.

The most famous horse sired by Poseidon is *Pégasos*. This horse is the offspring of Poseidon and Gorgo Medusa: when Perseus cut Medusa's head, forthwith sprang the winged horse Pegasus and the golden giant Chrysaor. His mother Medusa was sometimes imagined as a horse. In the Iliad Hector leads into the battle horses “whose eyes had the stare of Gorgo” (Vernant 1987, 43). This Homer's simile describes the battle situation, but what is of interest here is the unconscious, inherited level: why would the simile be formulated like that at all, unless there is a tight connection between Gorgo and horses, and through that a connection between horses and death? Another mythological monster, *Mormô*, was a being from ancient folk-tales, which scared the little children,

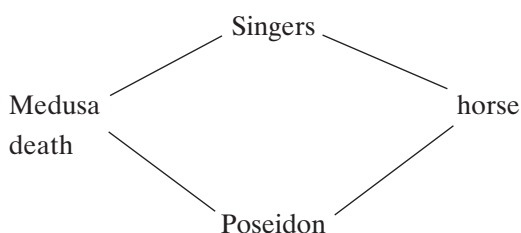
and was supposed to abduct them and take them into death. *Mormô* was a terrifying head, much like Gorgo Medusa, and Theocritus (Idyll. 15.40) describes her like a horse. When applied to horses, the term *gorgoûmai* means “stamping” (Vernant 1987, 56-57, 66). Gorgo Medusa, like *Mormô*, is the being of death, and her son Pegasus could have inherited this trait. Another trait that Pegasus shares with his mother is the wings. He is a supernatural horse that flies outside the real world. His name is, on the other hand, connected with the word *pégé*, “source, spring”, which was established already in antiquity (Hes. Th. 282). The name itself, and the fact that his father was Poseidon make him one of the “Source horses” (*Quellroß*) (Malten 1914, 185 n.4).

There is another instance when Pegasus is connected with a water-source. A story says (Paus. 9.29) that a man named *Pieros* came to Helicon from Macedonia. He had nine daughters, called *Pierides*, who had the same names as the nine Muses. Another source (Ant. Lib. 9) brings the story further: although identical to the nine Muses, the *Pierides* were the false Muses, who dared compete with the real ones. They were defeated and turned to birds. When they sang the world became dark and nobody listened to them. When the Muses started to sing, every thing stood still. The mount Helicon began to grow into heaven and then Poseidon ordered the winged horse Pegasus to strike the mountain with his hoofs. Where Pegasus struck, he opened the spring *Hippoukrene*, “Horse's spring” (Kerényi 1988, 105). Muses are otherwise connected with Pieria: Hesiod (Th. 53-79) said that Muses were daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, borne in Pieria; while Pausanias (9.29) informed us that originally they were only three and that *Pieros* brought the cult of the nine Muses to the Helicon (Gantz 1993, 54-55; Olmsted 1994, 76-77). It seems that on the earlier level *Pierides* and Muses were the same entities, and that brings forth the dark side of the Muses' character. That might be accented by the Orphic Theogony (fr. 179 Kern) where it is stated that *Eumenides/Erinyes* were the daughters of Hades and Persephone and were nine in all (Wüst 1956, 122)¹. So we can see different aspects of the nine singers: the light Muses, the dark *Pierides*, and the infernal *Erinyes*. No one listened when the *Pierides* sang and we suppose, not because their song was bad, but because no one of mortals was allowed or dared to listen. The darkness around shows clearly where to this song led: directly to the Other side. In that respect the song of *Pierides* equals the song of the winged Sirens. This story brings new elements into the shema:

¹ This is the only instance where there are nine *Eumenides/Erinyes*, otherwise they are two, fifteen, twelve, most frequently three. Wüst 1956, 122.

Horse + rock + spring + wings/flying + infernal figure + darkness beside the water + song/sound.

Pegasus is Medusa's son and reminds us of her nature — she leads directly to the Other side. His father Poseidon is also figure from the Other side: he is *paredros* of the Goddess and the master of horses, the father of supernatural horses and of the Arcadian Kore. The story connects the singers, the horse, death and Poseidon:



In the middle of the circle is a mortal man, who is in danger of being transported to the Other side if he happens to come face to face with either of the beings from the circle.

Equally famous is the horse *Aríôn* (*Areíôn*, *Eriôn*). The Arcadian myth from Thelpusa said (Paus. 8.25) that Poseidon *Hippios* mated with Demeter *Erinys* and she bore two children: a daughter with the secret name, called in public *Despoina* (equivalent of Kore), and the horse Arion (Malten 1914, 201; Vernant 1987, 74). On the other side of Greece, in Boeotia, there was a spring *Tilphôssa* (Paus. 9.33) and the grave of the Theban seer Teiresias nearby. On that very spot Poseidon sired the horse Arion. Alexandrian poets, notably Callimachus, said that his mother was one *Erinys* named *Tilphôssa* (Wüst 1956, 130; Dietrich 1965, 127; Stiglitz 1967, 114; Vernant 1987, 72). A very late source said that Arion was brought up by Nereids (the sea-creatures) and that they taught him to pull Poseidon's chariot above the waves with unsurpassed speed (Claud. IV cons. Honor. 555; Tümpel 1895, 622; Oldfield Howey 1923, 138). Further connection between the Boeotian spring Tilphossa and the horses can be found in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo (255 ff). When Apollo wanted to build his temple and oracle near the spring, the nymph Tilphossa spoke and advised him to build the temple in Krissa under the mountain Parnasos, because the numerous horses abiding by her water and coming there to drink would permanently bother him and his precinct (cf. Stiglitz 1967, 115).

Arion carried the hero Adrastus during the quest of the Seven against the Thebes. According to Antimachos (Apollod 3.6.8 with glosa of Antimachos) Adrastus was the first to drive a chariot with a pair of horses. Those horses were both of divine ancestry:

one was "the fleet Krakos", and the other "Telphusian Arion". The Iliad (23. 346 f) calls him "Adrastos' fleet horse", and Pausanias adds that Arion saved him from the battle of the Seven against the Thebes (Paus. 8.25). Antimachos (Thebais fr. 26 Ki) said that Adrastus was Arion's third owner, the first being Kopreus, Apollo's son. He carried Adrastus from the Thebes, returning to the rock of Kolonos *Hippios* in Attica (Dietrich 1965, 106-108).

That was not the only version, because ancient sources name as Arion's parents Poseidon and one *Harpyiê* (Eustath. ad Il. 23.344); or the wind Zephyros and one *Harpyiê* (Quint. Smyrn. 4.570) (Tümpel 1895, 621; Malten 1914, 199; Wüst 1956, 100; Dietrich 1965, 127). *Erinys* and *Harpyiê* are both infernal figures, which means that Arion can be considered an infernal horse.

Many etymologies have been proposed for the name Arion, none of them satisfying: one connects *Aríôn* /*Eriôn* with *Erinys*, the other puts together *Aríôn* and Ares (Dietrich 1965, 137 n.1). Perhaps the most promising is the suggestion that the name Arion could be of Scythian or Caucasian origin since in the Caucasus region many rivers are called Arion, Arios, Areios etc. There was the river *Aríôn* in Colchis (Ps. Scylax, Asia 82) and an island *Areôs* somewhere nearby (Ps. Scylax, Asia 86) (Eljnickij 1983, 109). It is possible that we have a river name from the same root on an inscription from Attica: *Po[t]ámôn Eri.* (IG III 1, 1259) (Malten 1914, 192). If this were true, that would fit nicely with the information that Arion was borne beside the spring *Tilphôssa* and would enhance his connection with water as "*Quellroß*".

Another side of his character can be seen in his colour: Hesiodic Heracles' Shield (120) calls him *Kyanochaítês*, "with *kýanos* hair", *kýanos* meaning "dark blue" (cf. Antimachos, Thebais ap. Paus. 8.25; while Hyginus Fab. 242 calls him *flavus*, "fair") (Malten 1914, 202 n.3; Stiglitz 1967, 118 n. 510). This midnight blue colour enhances his infernal character. He was divine, supernatural and he could talk: he warned his master Adrastus that the war against the Thebes would be disastrous and advised him to run away (Stat. Theb. 11.441 ff) (Malten 1914, 203). The Roman poet Propertius calls him *vocalis* because he announced the death of Archemoros in human voice (Tümpel 1895, 622). The figure of Arion repeats known elements and adds some new:

Horse + (rock ?) + spring/water + (wind ?) + supernatural speech + infernal figure + darkness beside the water

Hero Achilles had a pair of divine, immortal horses, *Xanthós* and *Bálíos*. They were Poseidon's wedding gift to Peleus and Thetis (Oldfield Howey

1923, 142)². They were borne to the wind Zephyros and *Harpyiê Podárgê*, on the bank of the Ocean (Il. 16.151; 18.297 ff). The west wind Zephyros clearly indicates the westernmost banks of the Ocean engulfed in perpetual darkness, where the Entrance of the Underworld was situated (cf. *Odyssey*, Book 11). Zephyros was often considered father of many horses and in popular tradition it was widely believed that mares could be impregnated by the west wind (Verg. *Georg.* 3.269-280). On the other hand, *Harpyiai* are regularly connected with the sudden blow of the wind which takes people away (Hes. *Th.* 267-269) (Malten 1914, 199; Arrighetti 1966, 32; Nagy 1973, 152 f; Nagy 1981, 209-210). They are best known from the story of the blind Phineus, tortured by *Harpyiai*, imagined like monstrous birds, who were taking his food. They were defeated finally by Kalais and Zetos, the sons of the north wind Boreus. The word *Harpyiê* stems from the root, which means “to snatch, to grab” (Marazov 1992, 66). They usually took mortals to their deaths (*Odys.* 1.241; 20.77 f) and they usually gave birth to horses. The late source (Nonn. *Dionys.* 37.219 ff) says that north wind Boreus and *Harpyiê Sithoníê* bore the swift horses *Xanthós* and *Podárgês*. Dioscuri also had a horse named *Hárpagos*, offspring of *Harpyiê Podárgê* (Stesich. *Fr.* 178.1 P) (Malten 1914, 200 n.1; Nagy 1973, n.94; Marazov 1992, 66). This horse, whose name stems from the root “to snatch, to grab” as well, is directly comparable to the Achilles’ horses, also *Podarge’s* children. *Harpyiê* as the mother of horses to the wind Boreus is interchangeable with another infernal creature — *Erinyes*. So it is said that *Erinyes* has borne to the wind Boreus four horses and those horses pulled Ares’ chariot into the battle (Quint. *Smyrn.* 8.243)³. Here we may add a statement from

the *Odyssey* (20.77 ff) that *Harpyiai* abducted the daughters of Pandareus and took them to the *Erinyes* (Wüst 1956, 100; Dietrich 1965, 144 n.8). *Harpyiai* and *Erinyes* become very close that way and both enhance the unfortunate, even infernal character of the sudden wind blows. These mutual relations between *Harpyiai*, *Erinyes* and winds must be very old, older than poetic similes. The cult of winds is attested in the Mycenaean times on the Linear B tablets and it is quite reasonable to presume that the close connection between *Harpyiai/Erinyes*, the winds, and the dead existed already in the Bronze Age (Gérard-Rousseau 1968, 32)⁴.

Boreus could impregnate mortal, ordinary horses⁵, and then his progeny were divine or demonic horses⁶. The Trojan king Erichthonios had 3000 mares, and Boreus liked some of them so much that they foaled 12 steeds. Those steeds raced across the fields without touching the ears of wheat, and they raced above the sea from one wave-crest to the other (Malten 1914, 189). Although this is the picture of (almost) flying horses “swift as the wind”, of special interest is the fact that they raced above the water⁷.

Xanthós, the immortal progeny of Zephyros and Podarge, like Arion, was endowed with speech. He foretold Achilles’ death, but *Erinyes* prevented him from telling more (Il. 19.408 f). By announcing someone’s death, he broke the natural order, and *Erinyes* intervened to preserve that order (Wüst 1956, 102). Unlike Arion, *Xanthós* was probably very light-coloured horse, since *xanthós* means “fair”. *Bálios* is the adjective usually given to the deer or the lynx, but when applied to horses means “dappled” (Oldfield Howey 1923, 158). The tradition of Achilles’ horses *Xanthós* and *Bálios* enclosed some well known elements:

² There was another horse in Achilles’ team: his name was *Pédasos* (Il. 16. 148-154). He was mortal, but was as fleet as immortal horses and easily kept pace with them (Sanz Donaire 2001, 146).

³ It is always possible that Quintus Smyrnaeus was imitating Homer while describing the horses of the god Ares, and created their picture after that of the Achilles’ horses. In that case, why would he replace *Harpyie* with *Erinyes* and where did he acquire the connection between *Erinyes*, the horse and the wind? His source should have been a popular notion which preserved very old relations. That is why we should take this source seriously. Of course, it is certain that the whole picture aims to the description «swift as the wind», but there is more to it than the common simile.

⁴ The tablets are from Knossos: Fp 1.10: Anemo/ijereja CT 4; Fp 13.3: Anemoijereja OLEUM 1/ Utano Anemoijereja C SL 1 CT 2. Gérard-Rousseau 1968, 32.

⁵ The proposed etymology of the word “horse” is in accordance with these ideas that horses were “fleet as the wind”. The PIE root * (Hj)ékwas gave eg. Latin *equus*, Tocharian *yakwe*, Lithuanian *ešva*, *ašva* (= the mare). This word is almost certainly connected with the PIE word *(Hj)okus (= swift, fleet), cf. Greek *ókús* (= swift), Sanscrit *ású* (= swift) (Gamkrelidze 1994, 37 ff; Parpola 1995, 354).

⁶ Sphocles in his *Antigone* described Boreus’ daughter and said that Boreus was swifter than the swiftest horse (cf. Bongard-Levin & Grantovskij 1981, 60). These ancient notions survived to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, so Torquato Tasso in his *Gerusalemme liberata* (VII, 555) wrote that Raimondo’s horse was offspring of a mare and the stormy wind (Oldfield Howey 1923, 130).

⁷ *Éós*, Greek goddess of dawn and herald of the gods, had a chariot with two horses: *Lampos* (= shining) and *Phaeton* (= brilliant) (Od. 23. 247-255). Hesiod (*Th.* 371-382), on the other hand, said that Eos bore to Astraeus three children — the winds Zephyros (the west wind), Boreus (the north wind), and Notos (the south wind) (Kazanas 2001, 270). Although Eos’ horses stand apart from the described ones, there is a connection between her, her horses and the winds.

Horse + (spring/water ?) + wind + supernatural speech + infernal figure + (darkness beside the water ?).

To them we may add the Erichthonios' horses with elements:

Horse + spring/water + wind + wings/flying.

Many more horses race through the Greek mythology, but apart from their names, we have little information about their character and ancestry⁸.

* * *

If we look at the table with structural elements, we can see that in Greek mythology supernatural, divine, or demonic horses come together with certain traits, some accented, some discreet, and some implied. The most conspicuous elements are the rock, the spring/water, and the wind; they are followed by the wings/flying, the supernatural speech, the infernal figure, and the darkness beside the water; sporadically are included the physical defect (of the horse), the state of unconsciousness, and the song/sound. Not all the elements appear in all the stories, but we do not expect them to. It seems as if each of the quoted stories preserved one portion of the (presumed) original sequence of ideas, a kind of "Urbild". If we were to tentatively reconstruct the original complex (Urbild) about the supernatural horse from all these elements, it would look like this:

supernatural horse, capable of flying (either with wings or by shear force), sometimes with a physical defect, and endowed with speech and prophetic insight, abides by the spring or water, or goes to the spring or water; there is a great conspicuous rock; by that water resides or appears an infernal figure, recognizable in the sudden blow of the wind, and the whole scenery is covered with darkness or the darkness suddenly falls; the sound or music can be heard here, and the person who happens to be there is frequently in the state of unconsciousness or disturbed consciousness (asleep). It is important to bear in mind that this is not the story, but the complex image, or sequence of motivems.

Now we must see if these elements appear elsewhere in similar circumstances and if they could throw additional light on the described image.

Horses were so intimately connected with water that they were in some instances identified with boats.

The process of that identification is specially observable on the petroglyphs from Northern Europe, where horses' heads frequently appeared on the prows of the represented boats (Østmo 1997). The main idea behind that identification should be the function of the horse as the means of transport across the water. Equally, among the Celtic gods as described in old Irish manuscripts, was the god Ler — god of the sea. His son was Manannán mac Ler and he was the protector of seamen. He had a team of horses who carried him across the sea, speeding above the waves, and he travelled to the Land of the Blessed in the far west. His favourite horse was Splendid Mane and he also ran on the land and above the sea (Oldfield Howey 1923, 142). Traces of the same idea can be discerned in the Greek tradition, so when Palaiphatos (29) was rationalizing the story of Pegasus, he said that Pegasus was in fact a boat that carried the hero to the far lands (Malten 1914, 185). The horse which carries a man across the water is not an animal from the real world, and we must suppose that we find here the image of the supernatural carrier that takes the souls of the dead (or the special mortals) to the Other side, across the boundary between the worlds. Let us be reminded that the battle described in the Iliad (21. 211-384) took place by the river *Xanthós*. Achilles' divine horse, which symbolizes the crossing of the boundary between the two worlds, has the same name as the river (cf. Fontenrose 1960, 243 n. 43; Sanz Donaire 2001, 146). That boundary is often conceived as a river or water of any kind. It is possible that the name points to the origin of the river and the horse from the mythological idea of the border between the worlds and of the guide who can cross it. On the other side of the world in India, but in the Indo-European environment, in the Rg-Veda we find the shining entity called *Apām Nápāt* (= offspring of waters), frequently described as "the one with the swift horses". The same entity "*Apām Napāt* son of waters with the swift horses" also appears in the Avesta (Kazanas 2001, 272). The Persian mythology offers some additional data. In the Avesta there is the story of the goddess of water Tishteri, or Tishterieh, or Tashter and her adversary Ap Oosh, the water antagonist. Ap Oosh imprisoned the waters and drought fell on the land. Tishteri turned into the white horse and tried to vanquish the Ap Oosh, who turned into the black horse. Two times she failed, but the third time, with the help of Ahuramazda, she was successful, and the rain fell on the earth. She had another ally in the form of the perfectly white three-legged donkey⁹.

⁸ Four horses, black as the night, pulled Hades' chariot. Their names are different in different sources, and perhaps the most beautiful description can be found in *The Rape of Proserpine* by Claudius Claudianus (1. 284-286):

Orphnaeus, savage and fleet, Aethon, swifter than an arrow, great Nyctaeus, proud glory of Hell's steeds, and Alastor, branded with the mark of Dis (trans. M. Platnauer, Loeb Classical Library, 1922).

⁹ Yazdi & Jalali 1999, 208-209; <http://www.iras.ucalgary.ca/~volk/sylvia/TheBestiaryProject.htm>. 16.1.2003. s.v. horses.

Here we find, not only the direct connection of the horse and water, but an animal from the equine family with the physical defect (the donkey had only three legs). The connection of the horses and water is obvious, and since it appears in such distant areas as Ireland, Northern Europe, Greece, Persia and India, which excludes direct influences, we must presume common origin in the Indo-European tradition.

This boundary is the place of crisis. For some it's crossing is irreversible, but some special individuals can go there and return. Facing this area sometimes demands a transitional state — a state of liminality. Liminality is often source of inspiration and charms, abode of poets, seers and shamans (Ellis-Davidson 1993, 8-9). The water to be crossed looks differently in different sources: it can be a swamp, a lake, a pond, a brook, a huge river, or a sea. The horse, which crosses that water is either winged, or at one moment acquires the function of the boat. For illustration we can mention a literary genre from Ireland called *Immramma*. Those are the stories of the voyages to different islands outside this world and without recognizable names. Most of the stories originated in the 9th and 10th centuries. The place of adventures is not explicitly determined as the Otherworld, but is obviously not this world either. What is conspicuous about them is that *Immramma* sea lacks any character. Many monsters lurk in its waters, but the sea itself is absolutely featureless (Wood 1993, 57-59). Although Juliette Wood (1993, 59) explains that lack of character by the fact that the adventures are imaginary, so neither the sea can be realistically described, we wonder if it is possible that this dark, featureless water, recognizable only as water/sea, descends from the ancient images, where the lack of any character (featurelessness, colourlessness) was the main trait of the Otherworld. In that respect it is worthwhile to quote the most famous of *Immrammas*, the Latin prose text known from circa 120 manuscripts, called *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*. Brendan sailed to the far West and came to the Promised Land. A circle of darkness surrounded that land and Brendan and his monks were allowed only to approach the river, where a shining man forbade them to go further and sent them back to Ireland (Kocher 1972, 16, 181). Here we have all the motifs already seen in Greek mythology:

The spring/water + the darkness beside the water + the supernatural speech

The river is the boundary that must not be crossed before the appointed time of death. The boundary is recognizable by the darkness on the bank and in the

voice of the supernatural creature that guards the crossing (*Navigatio Sancti Brendani* mentions that the monk Berinthus was the first to reach the Promised Land and this shining man met him there and told him that that land was the place for the God's saints, and Berinthus called him the angel. Kocher 1972, 187).

The table with the single elements extracted from the Greek tradition shows that the border was sometimes marked with the sound or music. In that case of special interest is one of the earliest representations of the ship with horse's head, the so called "Trumpet from Wismar", that might have been a musical instrument. It is tentatively dated to the III. Period of the Scandinavian Bronze Age (Østmo 1997, 306). If that were true, then we would have one object that combines three already known elements:

Horse + spring/water + song/sound.

When looking for a complex of ideas and images that would incorporate all the stated elements, we inevitably come to the shamanism. It is the only complex outside the ancient tradition, which combines all the marked motifs, and elaborates them. In all the shamanic stories there is a river or water of any kind that should be crossed during the shaman's ecstatic journey to the Otherworld. The voice of the liminal creature (or the watcher of the threshold) is heard beside this water. One Chukchee shaman told anthropologist Waldemar Bogoras that on the steep bank of the river existed life and that there was a voice speaking loudly. He added that he saw the master of the voice and spoke to him; he came there and answered shaman's questions¹⁰. Although a great time-span and geographical distance divide this story and the so called "Trumpet from Wismar" we cannot but think that the "Trumpet" might be the materialization of a similar account.

Different animals help shaman to cross the boundary, like deer, bear, and horse. When the Altaic shaman wants to go to heaven, he chooses the grey or some light-haired horse to be sacrificed. That horse's spirit should go in front of the shaman and lead him (Eliade 1985, 89, 191; Marazov 1992, 319; Brown 1993, 82). The horse sacrifice among the Mongols has many functions that are not of primary interest here, but it is important to mention that the sacrifice should be performed near the spring, river, or some other water (Anderson 1999, 383-384). In Central Asian shamanism the horse became the mythical image of death, presumably through his function of the animal, which carries the dead to the Otherworld. Among the Buriats there was a ceremony of the consecration of the new shaman. During the ceremony the apprentice

¹⁰ W. Bogoras, *The Chukchee*, American Museum of Natural History Monographs, Memoirs vol. 11, Leiden — New York 1904-1908, quoted by Halifax 1982, 9.

and his master ascended to the Spirit of the Upper world. This spirit had a drove of steeds "with wings on their backs" (Butterworth 1966, 140). In the medieval legend of the Ugrofinnic people Mansa there was the supreme god *Mir-Susne-Xum*, protector of people and land. He roamed the world on his white winged steed. Ugrofinnic and Indo-European peoples were in permanent contact since prehistory and that can explain many of the Indo-European traits found in the mythologies and the vocabulary of the Ugrofinnic peoples (Bongard-Levin & Grantovskij 1981, 76). These steeds are directly comparable, not only to Pegasus, but to Erichthonios' steeds as well, which raced as if flying and they raced above the water.

These flying capabilities of the supernatural horses are directly connected with a well known fact from the Siberian shamanism: that the shaman's drum was often called (e.g. among the Buriats) "the horse" (Butterworth 1966, 140). The sound of the drum carried the shaman far away on his ecstatic journey, and it is structurally identical to the horse, that is: the sound and the horse fulfil the same function. The Yacuts called the drum "shaman's horse"; horses were rendered on the drum of the Altaic shaman, and the drum of the Khoyot shaman was called *Khamu-at*, "shaman the horse"¹¹. The drum was not the only means of reaching the state of trance: Kirghiz shaman used the stringed instrument (kobuz) for the same purpose. Music and horses come very close in this complex (Eliade 1985, 144-145). Structurally this equals the combination of symbolic meanings on the quoted "Trumpet from Wismar". On the other hand, shaman's drum introduces the notion of rhythm, rhythm automatically introduces the notion of poetry, and that brings to mind already quoted sequence of structural elements (motivems):

Horse + spring/water + wings/flying + infernal figure + darkness beside the water + song/sound.

In Greek mythology this sequence is crystallized as the story of the competition in singing between the real Muses and the false Muses *Pierides*, themselves the infernal figures, of how the darkness fell when the *Pierides* sang and no one listened, and how the winged horse Pegasus opened the spring *Hippoukrene* with his hoofs on the rocky mountain Helicon.

These psychopompoi or the shamanic horses, beside the multiple legs, can sometimes have a physical defect. Greek horse *Skyphios* had distorted neck, and *Kyllaros*, horse of the Dioscuri, was in fact crippled, and the donkey from the Persian tale had only three legs. In the Norse mythology the goddess of death Hel or Hela, rode on the three-legged horse when she came to the land of the living (Oldfield Howey 1923, 205). In that respect we could quote a folksong from Devon (England) called "Widdecombe Fair". It is about Tom Pearce's grey mare, which should take a group of men to the fair in Widdecombe, but she died and in the end her bones and bones of the unfortunate men groan. After the thorough analysis Theo Brown (1993) concluded that the merry group were in fact the dead who did not reach their destination in the Otherworld because their supernatural guide, the horse, died. What is interesting is that Tom Pearce's grey mare, a real psychopompos, had a physical defect: she had horseshoes on three hoofs and one hoof bare (in some versions she had only one horse-shoe) (Brown 1993, 79). It is possible that modern folklore preserved a very old notion of the physical defect of the supernatural (shamanic?) horse.

Greek horses Arion and Xanthos were endowed with speech. Accordingly the Central Asian folklore is rich in legends about the horse that speaks to his master, or other people. He leads them and gives them advice: there is a Buriat story of the eightlegged horse, which talked¹², a Yacut story of the horse which advised his master, a Bashkir story of the horse

¹¹ Not only the drum, but the shaman's staff as well, was identified with the horse. Shaman's staff carried him on the long journeys to the Otherworld, as fast as the horse and as the drum (Rozwadowski 2001, 72).

¹² Multiple legs are a well known trait of the liminal carrier, although not our primary concern now, because Greek mythological horses do not have multiple legs. The best known is the Odinn's eight-legged horse Sleipnir, which had runes engraved on his teeth. God Loki turned himself into a mare and with the steed Svadhilfari foaled Sleipnir. This is very similar to the Greek (Arcadian) tradition where Demeter turned herself into a mare, and Poseidon himself into a horse and mated with her. Their offspring were a daughter called Despoina and the horse Arion. Sleipnir belonged to the god Odinn, himself endowed with what is considered shamanic power, and carried him through the air and also had the power to bring his rider to the world of the dead (Eliade 1985, 285 n.19; Ellis Davidson 1986, 141 ff; Williams 2001, 204). Horses with multiple legs persisted in folklore, so in the East Germany and Schlesien hobbyhorses with multiple legs were carried around by four, six, or eight young men: they were known as «Horses with many legs», and it is thought that this custom stems from the carrying of the funeral lier (Brown 1993, 78). The same idea can be found on the other side of the world in India. There *Bagri maro*, the horse with eight legs, is the name of the funeral lier (Ellis Davidson 1986, 141 ff). In Tungusia it is still believed that the shamanic mother of animals gives birth to the eight-legged animal (Marazov 1989, 12-13). Thracian and Dacian silver vessels often show deer with enormous antlers, combined with birds, or the endings of the antlers are rendered like bird heads, creating the mixed bird-deer creatures. These deer sometimes have eight legs. Such creatures are mediators between this and the Otherworld and are ridden by shamans when they cross the boundary (Kaul 1995, 20; Kull 1997, 240 ff; Milićević Bradač 2002). Considering the distance between these traditions, we can only conclude that they must come from some very old shamanistic tradition about the mediator with multiple (eight) legs, which brought shaman across the boundary between the worlds.

which sang, and so on (Roux 1959, 418 n. 103). Speaking animals are liminal creatures, as are the borderline figures abiding between reality and myth; this and Other world, people and animals, safety and fear, and that is probably why liminality is frequently expressed in mixed beings (*Mischwesen*) which belong to neither worlds and abide in both. This trait, combined with supernatural speech, could explain the representations of horses with human heads appearing in the Iron Age Europe (Green 1997, 906)¹³. In this respect of special interest is the winged horse with human head rendered on the kana no. 158 from the Rogozen treasure (Marazov 1992, fig. 65). It might be that the human head of a horse is the symbolic visual image of the notion that some horses had the human capability of speech — they advised their masters and foretold their future.

The Central-Asian peoples imagined the world of the dead as the huge land very similar to the pastures of this world, not limited to the circular space of the grave, and since the soul of the deceased had to travel a long way to reach the Otherworld, on that arduous journey she needed the guide and the carrier. In many of those traditions the guide was a horse: a white horse if the soul went to heaven, a black horse if the soul went to the Underworld (Barracano 1996, 196; Nonveiller 2001, 179-180; Rozwadowski 2001, 73). Teleuts, at the beginning of the 20th century, still offered a plate with food to the deceased, and sacrificed his favourite horse — the animal had the role of the guide to the Otherworld (Nonveiller 2001, 179). Connected with these ideas is the notion of the horses as guardians of the souls, particularly souls of the shamans and their relatives (Williams 2001, 204). The horse had many capabilities unknown to men — he knew the secrets of gods and men and saw what mortals could not see. All those traits were symbolically rendered in the reverence for the horse's eyes. In the Altaic shamanism there was a god who controlled the actions and the thoughts of humans and reported them to the supreme gods. His name was *Suila* and he had horse's eyes (Barracano 1996, 197). Seeing and not seeing in the Otherworld is one of the important traits of shamanism and we can say that it is symbolically rendered in the Greek mythology by the motif of "darkness beside the water". The darkness is just a symbolic way of saying that the features of the Otherworld are visible only for the supernatural beings (like animal guides) and for the special mortals like shamans.

Finally we reach perhaps the most complicated element in our tale: the rock. It is present in Greek

tradition as the rock standing beside the water, the rock under which the spring rushes, and the rock from which the magical horse is borne. One of the most interesting instances in Greek literature connecting the horse and the rock is Alcman's *Parthenion* (1. 45-49 P). Here the poet compares beauty of the girl Hagesichore with the marvellous horse: that horse will always get the prize (*aethlophóron*), his hoofs raise noise (*kanachápoda*), and he abides with the dreams under the rock (*tôn hypopetridiôn oneírôn*). In short, this is the unnatural horse, which comes "from the dreams under the rock" (Nagy 1973, 137). Malten (1914, 200) understood this as if Alcman was describing dreams as shaped like horses. Which rock is the abode of the horselike dreams? The answer is given in the *Odyssey*, at the beginning of the 24th book (the "Little Nekyia"). There it is said that dreams abide beside the White rock (*Leukàs pétrê*) at the entrance of the Underworld. Here we have explicit connection of the boundary between the worlds, the horses-dreams, and the White rock, or the wild rocky landscape, which marks the border. *Skirônídes pétrai* were the white rocks on the shore of the Saronic Gulf, between Krommyon and Megara (Plut. *Thes.* 10). Their name is derived from the word *skíros* or *skírros*, meaning "gypsum, stucco" (Novaro-Lefèvre 2000, 50-51). We must remember that the horse *Skirônítês* sprang from the rock, presumably white as gypsum, and that the horse himself must have been white. These *Skirônídes pétrai* are the very place where Poseidon, god of the sea, sent his monster, which killed Theseus' son Hippolytos — the boy went to his death by the white rocks. Theseus himself was Poseidon's son, and he met his destiny on the island of *Skíros*, when he jumped from the white rock to his death (Nagy 1973, 146). The story of Theseus and Hippolytos shows that the White Rock is indeed the place of death.

At the beginning of the 11th Book of the *Odyssey* (The "Nekyia") it is stated that there is perpetual darkness at the border. The sound or the voice of the infernal figure can be heard through the darkness, on the bank of the river in that rocky and steep landscape — we are told so in the story of Pegasus and the *Pierides*, in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, as well as in the testimony of the Chukchee shaman. Greek mythology preserved another description of the untamed, rocky and steep landscape, where the dark and poisonous water flows: that is the description of the source of the infernal water Styx under the huge rock (Bollack 1958). It refers to the mythological landscape of the Underworld¹⁴, and to the real landscape in Arcadia. Here in Arcadia (Paus. 8.15) the Stygian

¹³ Miranda Green (1997, 906) thinks that these creatures represent risks and dangers connected with battles and considers them signs of dislocation and violent death. Cf. Aldhouse Green 2001, 207-210.

¹⁴ Bollack (1958) elaborated a very complicated hypothesis on the connection between the word *hórkos*, «the oath», and *hérkos*, «the fence, enclosure». He gives the survey of the ancient sources, from Homer and Hesiod to the later times, of the river Styx and Stygian water.

water precipitated from the huge rock like a waterfall. Everywhere around were horrible rocks and ghastly scenery. Around this well named Styx was an enclosure made of stones and it was forbidden for all except the priest of Demeter Kidaria¹⁵. Water from this well was poisonous, unless it was drunk from the vessel made of horse's hoof and only by the priest. Let us remember that the water of the spring *Tilphôssa* in Boeotia (Paus. 9.33) was also poisonous, and it was said that the prophet Teiresias died because he drank its water, and was buried beside the spring (Vernant 1987, 71-72)¹⁶. Beside that very spring Poseidon sired the horse Arion.

I think that the description of the Styx is in fact the description of the end of the world, more precisely of the boundary between the worlds, like it appears in Central Asian shamanic traditions. Shamans who cross the border must cross the horrible rocky desert, where many of them died, and after that they come to the water. Frequently quoted is the testimony of an Altaic shaman, written down by Chivalkov (Chadwick & Zhirmunsky 1969, 253-254). Shaman described his journey south across the Altai, across

the Chinese land full of yellow sand, then across the yellow steppe, which not even a crow could cross, but he crossed it with a help of a song, then he travelled across the colourless steppe, the Iron mountain, down the precipice into the Underworld, and then across the sea, to reach the abode of Erlik Khan, the ruler of the Underworld. This report is very similar to the description of the Stygian landscape in the Greek tradition. If we compare the ancient sources, then these rocks must be white (*Leukas petre*). Only the dead could cross this land, and some very special mortals, who had special help: that of the divine horse and a song or a sound. Words said in precise rhythm took the shaman to the boundary and across, as did the horse.

This short survey of Greek and other data shows that much more traces of shamanism were left in the Greek tradition, than we would think on the first sight, and these traits are much older than the beginning of the colonization of the Black Sea and the first contacts with the Scythians. They must have arrived with the early Indo-European speakers, presumably during the Eneolithic period.

¹⁵ Hesiod (Th. 907) said that Zeus made love to the Oceanis named Styx and she bore him Perzephone. On this level it seems as if Styx and Demeter were at some time identical figures (Olmsted 1994, 50, 76).

¹⁶ In the Irish tradition there is the parallel for these notions of the poisonous Otherworld water. The story tells that Nechtan of Túatha Dé Dannan had a secret well, and only he and his three cup bearers could approach it. Everyone else would lose both eyes, because there was intensive energy emerging from the well (Kazanas 2001, 273). This story not only offers a good parallel for the water poisonous for everyone, except the chosen ones, like the water of the Styx in Arcadia, but emphasises the importance of eyes in the communication with the Otherworld.

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SAŽETAK

GRČKI MITOLOŠKI KONJI I GRANICA SVIJETA

Ključne riječi: konji, voda, izvori, Posejdon, Arion, Pegaz, Ksant, Balij, Skifije, Skironit, Kilar, Erihtonijevi konji, šamanizam

Grčki mitološki konji poput Pegaza, Ariona, Ksanta, Balija, Skifija, Skironita, Kilara, Erihtonijevih konja i mnogih drugih, pokazuju izravnu ili neizravnu vezu s bilo kakvom vodom (izvorima, rijekama, morem itd.). Ta posebna veza nije porijeklom od predodžbi o vegetaciji i plodnosti, već od predodžbi o vodi kao granici između svijeta živih i svijeta mrtvih. Konj je bio psihopomp koji je nosio ili vodio dušu umrlog preko granice. On je također nosio šamana na Onu stranu tijekom njegovog ekstatičkog putovanja. Konj koji nosi šamana u svijet mrtvih preko vode ili ima krila ili u jednom trenutku dobiva funkciju broda. U srednjoazijskom šamanizmu konj je tijekom vremena postao i živa slika smrti. Konji iz grčkog popisa nadnaravnih bića uglavnom su i dosljedno povezani sa skupinom ideja o Onom svijetu, a ne s kultovima plodnosti.

Na temelju antičkih izvora koji prenose priče o čudesnim konjima mogu se raspoznati neki motivemi (čiste strukture) koji se stalno ponavljaju (izneseni su u tablici motivema): stijena, izvor ili voda, vjetar, krila ili sposobnost letenja, nadnaravni govor, fizički defekt konja, neki infernalni lik,

tama koja se pojavljuje pored vode, pjesma ili neki zvuk, stanje nesvijesti ili poremećene svijesti (san). Ta zbirka motivema tvori «prasliku» (*Urbild*) koja je morala biti u korijenu većine priča i koja se može rekonstruirati. Izgledala bi otprilike ovako:

nadnaravni konj, koji može letjeti (bilo pomoću krila ili samo svojom snagom), ponekad s fizičkom manom, obdaren sposobnošću govora i proročkim darom, boravi pored vode ili dolazi do izvora ili vode; ondje se nalazi golema stijena, a pored vode boravi ili se pojavljuje neki infernalni lik; njegova se pojava očituje u naglom udaru vjetra i cijeli se okoliš prekriva tamom; može se čuti zvuk ili glazba, a smrtna osoba koja se ondje zatekne često je u stanju nesvijesti ili poremećene svijesti (usnula).

Važno je napomenuti da ovo nije priča, već složena slika ili slijed motivema. To je slika koja se pojavljuje u grčkoj mitologiji, kao i u srednjoazijskom šamanizmu, a opisuje granicu između svijeta živih i svijeta mrtvih koju mogu prijeći samo pokojnici ili neki nadareni pojedinci, koje nazivamo šamanima. Konj je vodič koji pokazuje put preko te granice. Pretpostavka je da ovi grčki mitološki konji pripadaju prapovijesnom indo-europskom nasljeđu, koje je silno iskrivljeno tijekom dugog razvitka grčke mitologije, ali se ipak može nazrijeti na razini čistih struktura.

Greek mythological horses: TABLE OF MOTIVEMS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Skyphios	the rock					the physical defect				the state of unconsciousness
Skironites										
Pegasos	the rock	the spring/water		the wings/ flying			the infernal figure	the darkness beside the water	the song/sound	
Arion	(the rock) ?	the spring/water	(the wind) ?		the supernatural speech		the infernal figure	the darkness beside the water		
Xanthos		(the spring/water) ?	the wind		the supernatural speech		the infernal figure	(the darkness beside the water) ?		
Balios										
Erichthonios' horses		the spring/water	the wind	the wings/ flying						
Kyllaros						the physical defect				

