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HESPERÍA

Università degli Studi
di Napoli "Federico II"
*Dipartimento di
Studi Umanistici*

TRADIZIONI, ROTTE, PAESAGGI

Luisa Breglia
Alda Moleti



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How “Western” Were the Ancient Oracles of the Dead?*

DANIEL OGDEN

Abstract – The ancient world knew of four great Oracles of the dead, Acheron, Avernus, Heraclea Pontica and Tainaron. With what points of the compass might they have been associated? It is easy to make the case that the two of these oracles that are better known today, Acheron and Avernus, had distinctively western affinities, not least because they were located on the western coasts of their respective land-masses. The case is harder to make for Heraclea Pontica, situated on the north coast of Asia Minor, on the (broadly eastern) Black Sea, though it did retain an association with the so-called Cimmerians, otherwise notorious denizens of the West in their mythological tradition. The most challenging case of all, however, is presented by Tainaron. This oracle was located on the extreme southern tip of the Greek mainland, whilst its mythology seemingly links it with the extreme East.

How “western” were the ancient oracles of the dead? Let us consider each of the big four oracles of the dead, or *nekyomanteia*, in turn¹. The case starts easily, but ultimately becomes more complex.

1. ACHERON

There is strong reason for holding that the ancients considered that the Acheron oracle of the dead occupied a distinctively “western” location. When Homer’s Odysseus approaches that point in the world at which he will summon up (and indeed go down amongst) the ghosts, as directed by Circe, he describes it in the following terms:

The sun set and all the roads fell into shade. The ship came to the far edge of deep-streaming Ocean. That is the location of the people and city of the Cimmerian men, buried in mist and cloud. Never does the shining sun look upon them with its rays, neither when he goes up to the starry heaven, nor when he turns back from heaven towards the earth. Rather, baneful night is spread over the unfortunate mortals. Here we came and beached the ship, and took the sheep out. Then we went on foot along the course of Ocean, until we came to the place that Circe had indicated.

Hom. *Od.* XI, 12-22

*) I thank Profs. E.L. Bowie and G. D’Alessio for helpful references for this paper.

1) For general analysis of these four oracles and the explanation as to why they seem to belong together in a special set, see OGDEN 2001, 17-92. I have discussed the spatial peculiarities of oracles of the dead and other underworld entrances from a different perspective in OGDEN 2010.

Although the description of a land where the sun never shines during any part of the day may prompt moderns to think of the arctic regions, it is rather more likely that the Homeric poets were envisaging with these words a land in the extreme West. In this way, the land makes a counterpoint and opposite pole to Circe's Aea, which can be seen as a land of sun, given that she is described as the Sun's daughter².

Odysseus' travels to the place in which he will consult the dead are not quite over. He has further instructions to follow from Circe first:

But when you have crossed Ocean in your ship, you will find a fruitful shore and the groves of Persephone, tall poplars and fruit-shedding willows. Beach your ship there by deep-eddying Ocean, but proceed yourself to the dank house of Hades. There is a place where Pyriphlegethon and Cocytus, which is an off-flow from the water of the Styx, flow into the Acheron, and there is a rock and the confluence of two loud-roaring rivers. Draw near to this spot, hero, and, as I bid you, dig a pit a cubit wide this way and that.

Hom. *Od.* X, 508-17

Whilst we have not yet left mythical geography behind completely – the Styx and Pyriphlegethon, the river of burning fire – this does read like an actual brief journey inland from Thesprotia's coast, up the historical Acheron river to its confluence with the Cocytus, where it formed the marshy "Acherusian lake", which was drained in the last century. This, at any rate, was what Pausanias thought, when he declared that Homer had shaped his underworld after seeing Thesprotia, and had borrowed the names of that land's rivers, the Acheron and the Cocytus, for it³. We may note that the Acheron valley is clothed in poplars and willows even today⁴.

Compatibly with this, in Odysseus' lying version of this oracular journey, he still takes himself to Thesprotia, this time to the adjacent oracle of Zeus at Dodona⁵. And when Hermes escorts the souls of the dead suitors to the underworld, he takes them there from Ithaca past the "white rock" of Leucas, which lies directly between Ithaca and the Acheron mouth⁶.

The corollary of this is that the mythical Acheron that was in due course to manifest itself at various other points too on the world's surface took its name from the Thesprotian river rather than *vice versa*, and this was presumably a result of the impact of Homer. There is no indication that the Thesprotian river ever had any other name in antiquity⁷.

It is possible to imagine that there was a time when the Thesprotian coast, the westernmost edge of the mainland occupied by the Greeks, was regarded as a sort of "ultimate West". So, at any rate, thinks M.L. West, for it is he that has suggested that the name *Acherōn* is derived from the Hebrew term *aharōn*, which signifies, *inter alia*, "western"⁸. This does seem implausible. For what it is worth – not much of course – ancient folk etymologies

2) Hom. *Od.* X, 138.

3) Paus. I, 17,4-5. JANSSENS 1961, 386; HAMMOND 1967, 370 with n. 1; DAKARIS 1960, 131; 1963, 54; 1973, 142; 1993, 7-9 agree with Pausanias.

4) DAKARIS 1993, 8-9.

5) Hom. *Od.* XIV, 316-33 and XIX, 287-99; cf. PHILLIPS 1953, 64-6; HUXLEY 1958, 248 and CLARK 1979, 49 and 58.

6) Hom. *Od.* XXIV, 11. JANSSENS 1961, 389 and SOURVINOU-INWOOD 1995, 104.

7) Thus CLARK 1979, 59 and SOURVINOU-INWOOD 1995, 76; *pace* ROHDE 1925, 52 n. 73.

8) WEST 1997, 156.

derived the name rather from *achos*, “grief” and, more desperately, *a-chairōn*, “joyless”. No doubt these notions were inspired by interpretations of the name *Kōkutos*, which was more easily read as an appropriate speaking name, “Wailing”⁹.

And it was somewhere beside the Acherusian lake, which was adjacent to the ancient town of Ephyra-Cichyrus (the modern village of Mesopotamo), that the historical “oracle of the dead” was located, as Pausanias tells us. The oracle is first referred to, Homer aside, by Herodotus in connection with Periander and the ghost of Melissa¹⁰. The oracle, insofar as it had any formal development, was probably based in a lake-side precinct, as is indicated by an important fragment of Aeschylus’ *Psychagogoi* (“Evocators”), a tragedy in which Odysseus’ consultation of the dead was re-enacted:

CHORUS OF EVOCATORS: Come now, guest-friend, be stood on the grassy sacred enclosure of the fearful lake. Slash the gullet of the neck, and let the blood of this sacrificial victim flow into the murky depths of the reeds as a drink for the lifeless. Call upon primeval Earth and chthonic Hermes, escort of the dead, and ask chthonic Zeus to send up the swarm of night-wanderers from the mouths of the river, from which this melancholy off-flow water, unfit for washing hands, is sent up by Stygian springs.

Aeschyl. *Psychag.* TrGF III F 273a

The site was also credited as the location of several of the great mythical descents to the underworld, those of Theseus and Pirithous, that of Heracles to fetch Cerberus, that of the same hero to retrieve Theseus, and also, as it seems, that of Hades with Persephone¹¹.

And what of the Cimmerians, to whom we shall have repeated cause to return? The third-century BC Proteas Zeugmatites argued that Homer’s “Cimmerians” was a corruption of “Cheimerians”¹², presumed inhabitants of cape Cheimerion (Χειμέριον) on the north side of the bay (now Ammoudia) into which the Acheron debouches, first mentioned for us by Thucydides¹³. If we take the grounding of the *Nekyia* in the topography of Thesprotia seriously, then this is a possibility that also must be given serious consideration. But why should the name have been remoulded, particularly given that there is no metrical reason for doing so? Possibly to assimilate it to κάμμερος, which Hesychius glosses as ἀχλύς, “mist”, as A. Heubeck argued¹⁴. But perhaps it is easier to suppose that the Cimmerians, so named, already had a separate mythological existence as a people of darkness and that this was their licence to enter the *Nekyia*, with or without the help of any historical Cheimerians.

9) *Sch.* Hom. *Od.* X, 514 and Serv. *in Verg. Aen.* VI, 107.

10) Hdt. V, 92 (νεκυομαντήιον); Paus. IX, 30,6 (νεκυομαντείον. cf. again I, 17,4-5); *Sch.* Hom. *Od. hypothesis* p. 5 Dindorf (λίμνην τὴν καλουμένην Νεκυοπομπόν); Ampel. 83 (*ad inferos descensus ad tollendas sortes*). The lexicographical sources locate a ψυχοπομπεῖον (“place of soul-sending”), among the neighbouring tribe to the Thesprotians in Epirus, the Molossians: Hsch. *s.v.* θεοὶ Μολοττικοί; Phot. *Lex. s.v.* θεοὶ Μολοττικοί; Eust. *ad Hom. Od.* X, 514.

11) Orpheus: Paus. IX, 30,6 and X, 30,6 (describing Polygnotus’ *Nekyia* fresco). Theseus (with Pirithous) and Heracles to retrieve Theseus: Paus. I, 17,4-5 (cf. FRAZER 1898, *ad loc.*) and Plut. *Thes.* 31 and 35; these accounts are rationalized; cf. MERKELBACH 1950; DAKARIS 1958a, 102; 1972, 142 and 1976, 310; JANSSENS 1961, 387; BROMMER 1982, 97-103.

12) Proteas Zeugmatites at EM *s.v.* Κιμμερίου; cf. HUXLEY 1958 and DAKARIS 1960, 121; 1961, 116; 1963, 54; 1972, 32; 1973, 142 and 1993, 9 and CLARK 1979, 60-1. For the notion that Homer thought he was referring to the historical Cimmerians of the Black Sea here, see BURY 1906.

13) Thuc. I, 46,4; cf. HUXLEY 1958; DAKARIS 1958b, 109; 1993, 8; HAMMOND 1967, 478 and CLARK 1979, 207.

14) HEUBECK 1963. Amongst attempts to historicize Homer’s Cimmerians, BURY 1906 locates them in Britain.

2. AVERNUS

It seems that, from the fifth century BC at any rate, some Greeks worked to shift the place of Odysseus' consultation of the ghosts and the associated oracle of the dead from the west coast of the Greek mainland to the west coast of the Italian mainland, to lake Avernus. This was part of the broader phenomenon of the relocation of Odysseus' wanderings to this coast, which had begun by at least the late sixth century. The colony of Circeii, occupying a promontory half way between Rome and Cumae, that had supposedly once been Circe's island, is first attested for us in the Carthaginian treaty of 508 BC and was reputedly founded under Tarquinius Superbus (r. ca. 543-10 BC). At some point in the sixth century too a few lines were being interpolated into Hesiod's *Theogony* to make Agrios and Latinos, Odysseus' sons by Circe, rulers among the Tyrrhenians¹⁵.

A careful reading of the *Odyssey* should indicate that wherever Circe was, Odysseus' oracle of the dead should not also have been. However... the earliest indication of an oracle of the dead being located on the west coast of Italy, and specifically at Avernus, and almost certainly therefore the place of Odysseus' consultation of the dead too, comes in a fragment of Sophocles (*floruit* 468-406 BC) who referred to "a *nekyomanteion* in/on a Tyrsenian [i.e. Italian] lake"; the fragment may also imply that Sophocles described the lake as birdless¹⁶. The case would be strengthened further if the fragment could be proved, as is suspected, to have derived from Sophocles' *Odysseus Acanthoplex*¹⁷. Aeneas was subsequently taken to Avernus in Odysseus' footsteps first by Naevius, so far as we can tell, and then most famously of course by Virgil¹⁸. After Sophocles Avernus seems to have received the designations corresponding to "oracle of the dead" with some frequency¹⁹. If the early Hellenistic Crantor of Soli took his fictional Elysium of Terina, a city in southern Italy, to the Avernus oracle then it may also have been known as a *psychomanteion*²⁰. Laberius (whose *floruit* fell in the earlier first century BC) would have known Avernus as a *nekyomanteion* if his mimes *Lacus Avernus* and *Nekyomantia* are indeed to be identified²¹. Diodorus and Strabo directly apply the term *nekyomanteion* to Avernus²². Servius perhaps implies a similar designation in

15) Odysseus on West of Italy: PHILLIPS 1953 (important) and cf. MARTIN 1984, 18-25. Circeii: Liv. I, 56 (cf. OGILOVE 1965, *ad loc.*); Polyb. III, 22 (treaty; cf. WALBANK 1957, *ad loc.*) and Strabo V, 3,6 C 232 (Odysseus' cup displayed there); cf. HARDIE 1969, 15, 33; 1977, 283; CASTAGNOLI 1977, 73-5. Hesiod: *Tb.* 1015-18; WEST 1966, *ad loc.*, dates the lines to ca. 550-500. Another important early reference to Odysseus in the West of Italy is Hellenic. (ca. 480-395 BC) *FGrHist* 4 F 84.

16) Soph. *TrGF* IV F 748 (= 748 Pearson) = *Anecd. Gr.* 414, 3 Bekker. Radt (*TrGF ad loc.*) raises the possibility that the Sophocles in question was not the tragedian but Sophocles Grammaticus.

17) Soph. *TrGF* IV F 453-61 (= 453-61 Pearson). Those who believe Aeschylus' *Psychagogoi* was set at Avernus may wish to make this rather the first trace of the tradition of Odysseus at Avernus, but see OGDEN 2001, 47-51.

18) Naev. *BP fr.* 12 Strzlecki and Verg. *Aen.* VI, 237-42.

19) The term *nekyomanteion* is also applied to Avernus at D.S. IV, 22; Strabo V, 4,5 C 244; *EM s.v.* Ἄορνος; Eust. *ad Hom. Od.* X, 514.

20) Crantor's Elysium: Cic. *Tusc.* I, 115; Plut. *Mor. Cons. Ap.* 109c-d and *Greek Anthology* appendix VI n. 235; cf. ROHDE 1925, 186 n. 23; CLARK 1979, 65-7; OGDEN 2001, 75-6; LUCK 2006, 262-4. Note also Eustathius' gloss of the term *nekyomanteion* as applied to Avernus with the term *psychopompion* (on Hom. *Od.* X, 514).

21) Laberius: fragments at BONARIA 1956, 47 and 52-5.

22) D.S. IV, 22; Strabo V, 4,5 C 244.

referring to *nekromantia* in connection with the lake²³. Maximus of Tyre refers less specifically to a *manteion antron*, an oracular cave, at the lake²⁴.

It is easy to understand how the site of Odysseus’ consultation could be rediscovered in Avernus. Those familiar with the Acheron *nekyomanteion* would have been looking for an underworld passage in the configuration of a lake. The flooded volcanic crater of Avernus, adjacent to the very point at which Greek colonists had first penetrated the Italian mainland, Cumae, ca. 760 BC, must have seemed ideal. Its steep, fertile rim was covered in thick, dark trees and the surrounding area, the Phlegraean (“fiery”) fields, was full of further volcanoes, fumaroles, mephitic gases and hot springs²⁵. Even the lake’s name could be made to work for the notion: the Italic form *Avernus*, signifying “place of birds” (cf. Latin *av-is*, bird; *-ernus*, productive suffix), was taken into Greek as *Aornos* and thereby, ironically, read as signifying “birdless” (cf. *a-*privative; *ornis*, bird). Hence the development of the notion that the lake itself, not merely the surrounding fumaroles, emitted gases of its own fatal to birds²⁶. Such, eventually, was Avernus’ distinction as an oracle of the dead that even the Acheron itself was rebranded an *Avernus/Aornos*, from the age of Pliny the Elder at least²⁷.

The first author indisputably to have located Odysseus’ necromancy at Avernus is Ephorus (ca. 405-330 BC)²⁸. Many were to follow in his wake²⁹. Ephorus, in an extensive fragment preserved by Strabo, makes much of the Night-dwelling Cimmerians’ original role in the oracle, albeit in a rationalising mode. Whether he was the first to transfer them to Avernus from the Acheron and probably, already, Heraclea Pontica (for which see below), is unclear:

Ephorus, assigning the place [*sc.* Avernus] to the Cimmerians, says that they live in underground houses, which they call *argillai* (clay-houses), and that they visit each other through tunnels, and that they receive strangers visiting the oracle, which is situated a long way under the earth. He says that they live on the profits of the mines and the consulters of the oracle, and the king who decreed contributions to them. He says that there is an ancestral custom for those that live around the oracle, that they should never see the sun, but that they should only come out of their holes at night. It was for this reason, he says, that the poet said of them that “nor ever does the shining sun look on them.” But, he says, these people were later destroyed by a king, when a divination did not succeed for him, although the oracle still remains, removed to another place.

Ephor. *FGrHist* 70 F 134a *apud* Strabo V, 4,5 CC 244-5

23) Serv. *in* Verg. *Aen.* VI, 107.

24) Max. Tyr. VIII, 2.

25) The modern Avernus and its adjacent fumaroles are superbly illustrated at MONTI 1980, 4-15 and 26-7.

26) Etymology of Avernus: for the productive suffix *-ernus* in Italic place-names, cf. *Falernus*, *Liternum*, *Privernum*, *Salernum*, *Tifernum* etc.; cf. AUSTIN 1977 on Verg. *Aen.* VI, 239 and CASTAGNOLI 1977, 47. Avernus as birdless: Heraclides of Pontus *fr.* 128a-b Wehrli; Timaeus *FGrHist* 566 F 57 (= Antigonus *Historiae mirabiles* 152 [168], denying the tradition); Lucr. VI, 740-6 (denying the tradition); Strabo V, 4,5 C 244; Verg. *Aen.* VI, 237-42 (including probable interpolation) with Serv. *ad loc.*; Sil. It. XII, 120-9; [Arist.] *Mir.* 95, 838a5 and *Sch.* Lyc. 704.

27) Plin. *NH* IV, 1 (*Aornos*); Paus. I, 17,5 and IX, 30,6 (*Aornos*); Hyg. *fr.* 88 (*lacus Avernus*). See DAKARIS 1958b, 109; 1993, 8-9 and 27.

28) Ephorus *FGrHist* 70 F 134a-b .

29) Lyc. 681-707; [Scymn.] 236-44; Strabo V, 4,4-7 CC 243-6; Plin. *NH* III, 61 (based on the reference to Cimmerians); Sil. It. XII, 113-57; Max. Tyr. VIII, 2; D.C. XLVIII, 50,4; Serv. *in* Verg. *Aen.* VI, 107 and Fest. 43 Müller.

The change of tense in Strabo's account of what Ephorus says, which this translation seeks to reflect, is unsettling. Strabo gives us to believe that Ephorus gave a present-tense ethnographic description of the practices of the Cimmerians, before relocating them to the remote past and declaring them long-vanished. Ephorus' vision of the Cimmerians – or perhaps it was just Strabo's account of it after all – seems to have been a key source of inspiration for Antonius Diogenes' lost novel, *The Wonders Beyond Thule*. As we learn from Photius' summary of it, its heroine Dercyllis came, in her wanderings, “to the Tyrrhenians, and from there to the so-called Cimmerians. With them she saw the things in Hades, and learned much about the things there, using as her instructress Myrto, a long-dead family retainer, who taught her mistress from amongst the dead”. It was surely the Cimmerians' inverted existence, emerging by night but keeping to their Hades-caves by day, as Ephorus had told, that formed the thematic model both for the spell Antonius' wicked Egyptian sorcerer Paapis casts upon Dercyllis and her brother Mantinias by spitting in their faces, which renders them, somehow or other, alive by night and dead by day, and also for the nature of another people visited by Dercyllis, the Iberians that were blind by day and sighted by night³⁰. A substantial papyrus fragment of the novel derives by chance from Dercyllis' encounter with the ghost of Manto under the guidance of our Cimmerians. Like many ghosts, Myrto craves vengeance against her killer and due burial. It was perhaps the wicked Paapis again that had killed her and left her body unburied³¹.

One might have thought that the strongest motivation for relocating Odysseus' travels on the west coast of Italy was the desire to push the consultation of the dead further and more gratifyingly westward. If so, the trend continued throughout antiquity, with Claudian even managing the feat of transferring the consultation to Gaul: “There is a place adjacent to the waters of Ocean, where Gaul extends its remotest shore, and it is here, they say, that Odysseus summoned the silent host with a blood libation”³².

3. HERACLEA PONTICA

The third of the great oracles of the dead to which we turn is that of Heraclea Pontica, half way along the southern coast of the Black Sea. It is hard to know when this oracle, or the idea of it, became established. The sure terminus *ante quem* is the date of Xenophon's *Anabasis*, composed at some uncertain point in the earlier fourth century BC, which refers to the “Acherousian” Chersonese adjacent to the city, and notes that this was where, “Heracles is said to have gone down for Cerberus” and where the locals now show a cave that descends for two stades as evidence of Heracles' descent³³. A less secure *terminus ante* would be ca. 479-7 BC, the approximate chronological setting of the action of the highly

30) Antonius Diogenes *Wonders Beyond Thule*, summarised at Phot. *Bibl. cod.* 166. For the Iberians here, cf. the Celts – Celtiberians? – mentioned at Eudoxus of Rhodes *FGrHist* 79 F 1 = Apollon. *Mir.* 24.

31) *PSI* 1177. Further discussion at STEPHENS – WINKLER 1995, 101-78 and OGDEN 2009, n. 311. The claim of *P.Mich.* inv. 5 to belong to this novel is poor. However, two actual new fragments of the novel were published in 2006 by P. Parsons: *P.Oxy.* 4760-1; they are discussed by BOWIE 2009.

32) Claud. *in Rufin.* I, 123-5: *est locus extremum pandit qua Gallia litus / Oceani praetentus aquis, ubi fertur Vlixes / sanguine libato populum mouisse silentem.*

33) Xen. *An.* VI, 2,1-3.

mythologised tale of the regent Pausanias’ visit to the oracle to consult the ghost of Cleonice, as preserved by Plutarch, Pausanias and Aristodemus³⁴.

But the terminus *post* for the establishment of the oracle of the dead is the foundation (by the Megarians), and more particularly the naming, of the city of Heraclea itself, ca. 560 BC³⁵. For in retrospect at any rate the justification, the aetiology, for the city’s name was the fact that Heracles had dragged up Cerberus from the underworld through a passage in the vicinity. No doubt the dislodging of Cerberus, albeit only temporary, had rendered the passage an easier place of ascent for the ghosts the dog confined. The tradition, as it developed, was a charming one. As Heracles led the now meek hound out of the underworld to emerge at the future Heraclea, the dog caught its first sight of the daylight it had never known and was terror-stricken, and began to strain at the leash. But Heracles pressed on and succeeded in dragging him out. As he emerged the dog slavered or even vomited over the local flora in his terror, thus creating the poisonous aconite³⁶. Cerberus’ form did after all, let us not forget, incorporate those of venomous serpents (*drakontes*), a fact remembered better in the iconographic record than the literary one³⁷.

Plutarch applies the term *nekyomanteion* to Heraclea in his tale of Pausanias and Cleonice in the *Cimon*, but uses *psychopompeion* in the parallel *Moralia* version. The latter term inevitably underlies the corrupt MSS readings of Ammianus, who also appears to attest the oracle’s continued operation in his own fourth-century AD age³⁸.

The literary sources tell that the oracle was located in the wooded valley of the river Soonautes, below the highest point of the chersonnese, now called Baba Burnu, and not far from the port of Akone³⁹. The literary sources are also unanimous in presenting the oracle as a deep cave, quite compatibly with the notion that it should have been here that Heracles dragged Cerberus out of the underworld⁴⁰. These texts enabled W. Hoepfner to identify the cave as the middle one of three on the south side of the Acheron valley⁴¹.

Once again, names travelled back and forth: the Heraclea cave became “Acherusian” (*specus Acherusia*), as did the chersonnese on which it was situated. The river Soonautes that flowed beneath it became an Acheron, amongst other things, and a nearby lake became *Acherousias*⁴².

The peoples that had invaded the area around the future Heraclea in the eighth century BC conveniently called themselves by a name the Greeks could recast as “Cimmerians”,

34) Plut. *Cim.* 6; *Mor. De Sera* 555c; Paus. III, 17 and Aristodemus *FGrHist* 104 F 8. Was it believed that the indigenous Maryandyni had previously operated an oracle of the dead in the cave? *Sch.* D.P. 791 refers to the cave as “the descent of the Maryandyni”.

35) Foundation and naming of the city: Xen. *An.* VI, 2,2; A.R. II, 727-48; D.S. XIV, 13 and Mela I, 103; cf. HOEPFNER 1966, 28-9 (Heracles on the city’s coins) and BURSTEIN 1976, 16 (foundation date).

36) Xen. *An.* VI, 2,2; *Ov. Met.* VII, 406-19; Mela I, 92; *Sch.* A.R. II, 353, incorporating Herodorus of Heraclea *fr.* 31 Fowler and Euphorion *fr.* 41 Lightfoot; *Sch.* Nic. *Alex.* 13b; D.P. 788-92; Eust. *ad D.P. ad loc.*, incorporating Arr. *FGrHist* 156 F 76a.

37) *LIMC s.v.* ‘Herakles’, 2553-4, 2560, 2571, 2579, 2581, 2586, 2588, 2595, 2600, 2603-6, 2610-11, 2614, 2616, 2621, 2628. For references to Cerberus’ serpentine element in the literary tradition, see Euphorion *fr.* 41 Lightfoot; Sen. *HF* 782-829; Apollod. II, 5,12; Paus. III, 25,4-6 (incorporating Hecat. *FGrHist* 1 F 27).

38) Amm. Marc. XXII, 8,16-7.

39) Xen. *An.* VI, 2,2; A.R. II, 727-48; D.S. XIV, 31,3; Q.S. VI, 469-91 and Amm. Marc. XXII, 8,16-7.

40) Xen. *An.* VI, 2,2; *Ov. Met.* VII, 406-19; Mela I, 92; Plin. *NH* VI, 4; Q.S. VI, 469-91; Amm. Marc. XXII, 8,16-7.

41) HOEPFNER 1966, 2, 21 with plan i, and 1972, 41-6 with plan 4 and plate 1 a-b.

42) See again the sources for the oracle’s topography, above. For the lake’s name see *EM s.v.* Ἀχερουσιάς.

and so the perennial mythical neighbours of the underworld and oracles of the dead could be found at this one too. In Assyrian they were Gimmirai, their land Gamir; in Hebrew their land was Gomer⁴³.

But Heraclea was not merely an importer of oracle-of-the-dead furniture, it was also an exporter. Its connection with Cerberus proved particularly enchanting, and even transformed the Cimmerians of other oracles into Cerberians (though there is no indication that this happened, curiously, in the case of Heraclea's own "Cimmerians"). This may have been true already for Sophocles in the case of Avernus if his reference to "Cerberians" was made in the *Odysseus Acanthoplex*⁴⁴. The notion may also have been entertained by Ephorus, if he did indeed refer to the Avernus oracle as "Cerberian" as well as a "Cimmerian", presumably participating in the familiar debate between the two terms⁴⁵. As to the Acheron, Aristarchus and Crates wished to emend Homer's adjacent "Cimmerians" to "Cerberians"⁴⁶. Strabo may hint that Cerberus vomited there too, when he notes that Odysseus found poisons in Thesprotian Ephyra, which was the site of the *nekyomanteion*⁴⁷.

With Heraclea we have to give up the notion that, for the Greeks, the oracles of the dead must ever belong to the West. There is no way in which Heraclea could have been conceptualised as western: it was, of course, rather closer to the eastern limit of the Greek world. If this oracle was to be conceptualised as liminal in any way, the best claim would seem to be that it was situated at a northern extremity, on the north coast, that is, of Anatolia, albeit by no means at the northernmost point of it. But then neither the Acheron nor Avernus occupied the westernmost points of their respective landmasses either. And if the Greeks had known Olbia on the north shore of the Black Sea since 633 BC, when it was created by Miletus, long before the foundation of Heraclea, then we can be equally sure that they were similarly aware of other lands to the West of Thesprotia and Campania in the seventh and fifth centuries BC respectively. Still, if the Heraclea oracle could not be regarded as located in a western position in any significant way, it did, nonetheless, have the comfort of the proximity of those iconic western-dwellers, whose lifestyle was determined by their westernness, the Cimmerians.

In the *Orphic Argonautica* the Acheron itself was to acquire a northern identity. Here, after the theft of the fleece, the Argonauts travel north out of the Black Sea through lake Maeotis and up the Tanais river, ultimately to the land of those iconic denizens of the north, the Hyperboreans, and thence westwards through the outer Ocean to a race of Cimmerians, evidently far removed from the site of the Heraclea oracle. Beyond these they find the Acheron, with its black marsh and the gates to Hades, "the land of dreams". Across the river from the underworld entrance lies the city of Hermioneia, from which its dead are

43) Cimmerians at Heraclea: Heraclides of Pontus *fr.* 129 Wehrli; Domitius Callistratus of Heraclea *FGrHist* 433 F 2 and Arr. *FGrHist* 156 F 76. Gomer: *Genesis* X, 2-3 etc. See BURSTEIN 1976, 6-8 and HEUBECK *et alii* 1988-1992, ii at Hom. *Od.* XI, 14-9.

44) Soph. *TrGF* IV F 1060 (= 1060 Pearson); note also the deracinated reference to "Cerberians" also at Ar. *Ra.* 187. Cf. PHILLIPS 1953, 56 n. 29 and CLARK 1979, 65.

45) Ephorus *FGrHist* 70 F 134b = [Scymn.] 236-43 (pp. 205-6), οὗ Κερβερίον τι δείκνυται ὑποχθόνιον μαντεῖον. Lucian *DMort.* 12 has Heracles subjecting Avernus.

46) *Sch.* and Eust. *ad* Hom. *Od.* XI, 14; cf. also EM *s.v.* Κιμμερίους (513, 44).

47) Strabo VIII, 3,6 C 338, referring to Hom. *Od.* I, 259-62 and II, 328; cf. DAKARIS 1960, 121-2 and BERNAND 1991, 208.

transported directly to Hades with a simple ship-journey across the river; the city is evidently modelled on Argive Hermione, which was reputed to be so close to the underworld that the dead were dispensed from their obligation to pay the ferryman⁴⁸.

4. TAINARON

The oracle of the dead at Tainaron, Cape Matapan (Mani), is formally so defined by Plutarch, who applies the term *psychopompeion* to it, and by Hesychius, who implies that the terms *nekyomanteion* and *nekyōr(i)on* were applied to it⁴⁹.

Tainaron was known to boast a passage to the underworld at any rate from well before the age of Hecataeus (fl. ca. 500 BC). For Hecataeus himself the myth that Heracles had dragged Cerberus up into the light there was already so well established as to be worthy of rationalisation (Cerberus becomes a large poisonous snake haunting the area). The cape was frequently mentioned in this connection thereafter⁵⁰. From Aristophanes onwards it is referred to as a place at which the dead in general could descend⁵¹; from Apollonius onwards as the place of Theseus’ descent (with Pirithous)⁵²; from Virgil onwards as the place of Orpheus’ descent for Eurydice⁵³.

Tainaron is the only one of the “big four” oracles of the dead that the literary sources seem to allow us to locate with full precision. The information supplied by Menander, Strabo, Pomponius Mela, Statius, Pausanias and others allows us to say with confidence that it was located in a small, walled-off cave in Sternis bay at the tip of the promontory and beneath the humble temple of Poseidon, latterly a Christian chapel and now in ruins⁵⁴. Archaeology provides no dates for the *nekyomanteion*. The literary sources send Corax there to consult the ghost of Archilochus soon after his death, ca. 650 BC, but the tale can hardly be historical, as we will see. In the second century AD Pausanias implied that it was still functioning.

So, in the case of Tainaron we have a strongly located Oracle of the dead, but another one that defies attempts to characterise it as “western”. The point of the compass most graphically and obviously celebrated in this location, the tip of this long promontory pointing down from the Peloponnese into the Mediterranean sea, the most southerly part of the

48) *Orph. Arg.* 1049-142; see the helpful map inserted at the end of VIAN 1987. Argive Hermione: Eur. *HF* 615; Call. *Hec. fr.* 99-100 Hollis; Strabo VIII, 6,12 C 373; Paus. II, 35.

49) Hsch. *s.v.* νεκυώριον; Plut. *Mor. De Sera* 560e-f.

50) Soph. *Heracles (at Tainaron)* TrGF IV FF 224-34 (= 224-34 Pearson) and Ἐπι Ταϊνάρῳ Σάτυροι TrGF IV FF 19a-e; Eur. *HF* 23; Strabo VIII, 5,7 C 363; Paus. III, 25 (incorporating Hecat. *FGrHist* 1 F 27); Apollod. II, 15,12; Sch. D.P. 791. Nicander’s claim that poisonous aconite grew at Tainaron (*Alexipharmaka* 41, with MEINEKE 1843, *ad loc.*, p. 64) almost certainly presumes that Tainaron was a place of Cerberus’ emergence, in light of the Heraclea Pontica material; the notion may already underlie Hecataeus’ rationalisation of the Tainaron Cerberus into a poisonous snake.

51) Ar. *Ra.* 187 (Charon’s ferry-stop); Sen. *HF* 662-96; Stat. *Th.* II, 32-57; Paus. III, 25.

52) A.R. I, 101-2, with Sch. Hyg. *fab.* 79, etc.

53) Verg. *G.* IV, 467; Ov. *Met.* X, 13; Sen. *HF* 587 and *Herc. Oet.* 1061-2; *Orph. Arg.* 41.

54) Men. *fr.* 785 Körte-Thierfelder; Strabo VIII, 5,7 C 363; Mela II, 51; Stat. *Th.* II, 32-57; Paus. III, 25; cf. also Tz. *ad Lyc.* 90; Sch. Pind. *P.* IV, 76d; Sch. Ar. *Ach.* 509. Seneca’s description of thick forests, a high crag and an immense cave, *HF* 662-96, is assembled from commonplaces. Discussion at ZIEHEN 1929, 1503; COOPER 1988, 69-70; SCHUMACHER 1993, 72-4 and OGDEN 2001, 34-7.

Greek mainland and dramatically so, is surely “south.” Beyond that, the oracular cave was positioned on the eastern, not the western, side of the cape. The promontory is so narrow at this point that one might wonder whether one can meaningfully distinguish “East” from “West” there at all. But the mythology attending upon the oracle seems to suggest that we can indeed do so.

As with Heraclea Pontica, tradition preserves a single, gloriously unhistorical tale of a consultation of the Tainaron oracle:

The gods do not forget excellent men even after their death. At any rate Pythian Apollo took pity on Archilochus, a noble poet in other regards, if one were to take away his obscene and abusive language and rub it out as if it were a blemish. This was even though he was dead, and that too in war, where, I suppose, Enyalios is even-handed. And when the man who had killed him came, Calondas by name, nicknamed Corax, asking the god about the things he wanted to inquire about, the Pythia did not admit him as polluted, but uttered those famous words. But he countered with the fortunes of war, and said that he had been in an ambivalent situation in which he had either to do what he did or have it done to him. He claimed that he should not be hated by the god, if he lived in accordance with his own fate, and he cursed the fact that he had not died rather than killed. The god took pity on his situation, and bade him go to Tainaron, where Tettix (“Cicada”) was buried, and to propitiate the soul of the son of Telesicles and render him friendly with libations. He followed these instructions, and freed himself from the wrath of the god.

Suda s.v. Ἀρχίλοχος = Ael. *fr.* 83 Domingo-Forasté = Archil. T 170 Tarditi⁵⁵

Corax comes to the *nekyomanteion* to beg off the anger of the person he had killed, just as Pausanias did at Heraclea⁵⁶.

So who was this Tettix? The only source to attempt to tell us anything of his identity is Hesychius, who explains the lemma Τέττιγος ἔδρανον (“Seat of Tettix”) with ἡ Ταίναρος. Τέττιξ γὰρ ὁ Κρήσις Ταίναρον ἔκτισεν (“Tainaron. For Tettix the Cretan founded Tainaron”). This mystifying cul-de-sac of a claim has the feel of being a mythological rationalisation in the Palaephatan tradition, not least because the explanation “Tettix the Cretan founded Tainaron” does not read like a very convincing or well-targeted explanation of the phrase Τέττιγος ἔδρανον.

So, laying Hesychius aside, what else could we make of the name Tettix? P.L. Fermor tells us that cicadas are prolific on the modern Mani; if they were equally prolific on the ancient Mani, this was presumably a relevant fact⁵⁷. But in any case, the rich symbolism the cicada held for the ancient Greeks, so well explored by, amongst others, M. Davies and J. Kathirithamby in their excellent book on *Greek Insects*, was enough to justify a personified role for it at the *nekyomanteion*. The symbolism is encapsulated by this Anacreontic poem:

You are the honoured sweet prophet of summer for mortals. The Muses love you, and Apollo himself loves you, and gave you shrill song. Old age does not wear you down, wise one, earth-born one, lover of song. You cannot suffer, your flesh is bloodless, you are almost like the gods.

Anacreontea 34, ll. 10-8

55) Cf. Plut. *Mor. De Sera* 560e-f (= Archil. T 141 Tarditi) and *Num.* 4 and Gal. *Protr.* IX, 1.

56) Cf. PAPACHATZIS 1976, 107.

57) FERMOR 1958, 41. Note Hsch. *s.v.* λιγάντωρ: εἶδος τέττιγος. Λάκωνες.

The cicada’s affinity with necromancy is clear. It sang as a prophet. Just like a ghost, it derived from the earth, it was ancient and bloodless, and it was wise. But at the same time it was immortal, and so resembled oracular heroes such as Trophonius and Amphiaraus, who were at once dead and alive⁵⁸. Corax’s consultation of the ghost of Archilochus merges into a consultation of the proprietorial Tettix himself, for Archilochus had identified himself as a cicada in his poetry, and Aesop told that cicadas were (like Archilochus) themselves dear to the Muses⁵⁹.

Perhaps we can be more specific about the particular Tettix at Tainaron. There was, of course, a famous Tettix of myth: the Tettix that was what became of Tithonus. In the canonical version of the tale, Dawn (Eos) fell in love with Tithonus and secured him immortality from Zeus, but forgot to ask also for eternal youth. Like the Sibyl, he aged and shrivelled until he became immobile, whereupon the goddess transformed him into a cicada and kept him sealed up in a chamber or hung him up in a basket, where he chattered on, as the insect does⁶⁰.

There is some dispute as to at what point the motif of Tithonus being finally transformed into a cicada was first developed. It is first formally attested in a fragment of Hellanicus⁶¹. However, I feel sure that it was already known to the author of the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*. The line in which he describes Dawn finally storing away the withered Tithonus in a chamber is heavy in taus and thetas: ἐν θαλάμῳ κατέθηκε, θύρας δ’ ἐπέθηκε φαιινάς⁶². A sound-effect is aimed at, and that sound effect is surely the singing of the cicada (cf. the name Τιθωνός and the term τέττιξ themselves)⁶³.

A recurring feature of the Tithonus tradition is that he is strongly grounded in a certain place, be it a bed, a chamber or a basket within which he is confined. As to the first, Homer refers to his λέχη⁶⁴, the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* to his εὐνή⁶⁵, Tzetzes, commenting on the Lycophronian *Alexandra*, to his κοίτη⁶⁶. As to the second, the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* tells of Dawn keeping him in her *megaron* (ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ἔχουσα)⁶⁷ and finally, when he had become completely immobile, “storing him away in a chamber” (ἐν θαλάμῳ κατέθηκε)⁶⁸. Propertius refers to Tithonus living in Dawn’s *domus*⁶⁹. As to the third, Aris-

58) Cicada symbolism: BODSON 1975, 16-20; DAVIES – KATHIRITHAMBY 1986, 113-33; BRILLANTE 1987 and 1991, 112-43 (with a valuable discussion of the cicada’s ability to mediate with worlds both above and below at 138-40) and KING 1989.

59) Archil. *fr.* 223 West; Aesop. *fab.* 470 Perry.

60) See especially *b.Ven.* 218-38 and *Sch. Hom. Il.* XI, 1; further references in the following notes and at WÜST 1937. Tithonus’ shrivelling: Ath. 548c; Eust. *ad Hom. Od.* V, 121 and *Il.* XXIII, 791 and Tz. *ad Lyc.* 18. For Tithonus’ iconography, in which he is occasionally shown as a wizened dotard, but never as an actual cicada, see BLOCH – MINOT 1986; WEISS 1986 and KOSSATZ DEISMANN 1997, with the associated LIMC catalogues.

61) Hellanic. *FGrHist* 4 F 140 (= 140 Fowler); cf. GANTZ 1993, 36-7. The transformation is then attested by Meleager *AP* VII, 196,4 = *HE* 4069 Gow-Page (where the association of the cicada with Ethiopia, for which see below, entails that Tithonus is in mind); Serv. *in Verg. G.* III, 328; Eust. *ad Hom. Il.* I, 624,22; III, 133,20-XIII, 134,13; IV, 838,10-1; *ad Hom. Od.* I, 205,26-8 and Tz. *ad Lyc.* 18.

62) *H.Hom.Ven.* 236.

63) ALLEN 1987, 18-26 tells us that the degree of aspiration of the theta in archaic and classical Greek was lighter than that of the unvoiced English “th”, and corresponded better with the English “t”.

64) *Hom. Il.* XI, 1-2 (= *Od.* V, 1-2).

65) *H.Hom.Ven.* 230.

66) Tz. *ad Lyc.* 18.

67) *H.Hom.Ven.* 231.

68) *H.Hom.Ven.* 236.

69) Prop. II, 18,8.

tote's pupil Clearchus of Soli confines him within a basket or wicker cage (τάλαρος)⁷⁰. Eustathius similarly has him confined within a wicker cage (τάλαρος) or a basket with a pointed bottom (κάρταλος)⁷¹.

It is the second set of references here, those to a house or chamber, that have a particular resonance for the Tettix of Tainaron. Plutarch's version of the tale of Corax and Archilochus refers to the oracle as the "house (*oikēsis*) of Tettix"⁷², whilst Pausanias, without specific mention of Tettix, refers to the oracle as "an underground house (*oikēsis*) of the gods into which souls are gathered"⁷³. And then, as we have seen, Hesychius preserves the curious soubriquet for Tainaron, *Tettigos hedranon*, "seat", "abode of Tettix." This correspondence seems to me to argue strongly for Tainaron being regarded as the resting place, the dwelling place of Tithonus. Whether Tithonus-Tettix himself had a direct role in necromantic consultations that took place at Tainaron is unclear, though in any case nothing turns on this for the current argument. In *Greek and Roman Necromancy* I suggested that Tettix perhaps had a mediating role at the oracle. Perhaps he introduced consulters of the oracle to the other ghosts as did Homer's Tiresias at the Acheron and Virgil's Anchises and Silius' dead Cumaean Sibyl at Avernus⁷⁴.

But if the Tettix of Tainaron is indeed Tithonus, then striking implications follow for the conceptualisation of the oracles of the dead in relation to the compass: for the place in which Tithonus lies or is confined ought, manifestly, to be the East. That Dawn should be associated with the East is a point that hardly needs to be argued. But the accounts of Tithonus-Tettix's myth do seem to root him emphatically in the East too. Already Homer speaks of Dawn rising "from the bed of the bed of noble Tithonus"⁷⁵. A Sappho fragment has Tithonus telling his story: he concludes with a somewhat obscure observation seemingly best construed as "love has given me the brightness and beauty of the sun"⁷⁶. The *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, which preserves the earliest full-blown account of the tale, tells that "So long as multiply lovely youth possessed him, he delighted in early-born golden-throned Dawn and dwelled beside the streams of Ocean at the ends of the earth"⁷⁷.

If eastern-facing necromancy seems paradoxical, we might remind ourselves of Apuleius' description of his Egyptian priest Zatchlas reanimating the corpse of Thelyphron for necromantic purposes: "Then he faced east and prayed silently to the majesty of the rising sun. By this awesome show he brought his audience to the eager expectation of a miracle"⁷⁸.

But perhaps, in a bizarre way, Tainaron can be salvaged in one affinity for the West after all. Tithonus is strongly associated with Ethiopia⁷⁹. Hesiod makes Tithonus the father, by Dawn, of the Ethiopian Memnon. The Lycophonian *Alexandra* has Dawn leaving Tithonus in his bed to fly over the steep hill of Phegion, an Ethiopian mountain⁸⁰. Apollodorus has Dawn

70) Clearchus *fr.* 55 Wehrli, *apud* Ath. 6b-c (cf. 548f).

71) Eust. *ad* Hom. *Il.* IV, 838,10-1; *ad* Hom. *Od.* I, 205,26-8.

72) Plut. *Mor. De Sera* 560e-f (= Archil. T 141 Tarditi).

73) Paus. III, 25.

74) Hom. *Od.* XI, 90-151; Verg. *Aen.* VI, 679-901 and Sil. It. XIII, 488-894; OGDEN 2001, 37-9.

75) Hom. *Il.* XI, 1-2 = *Od.* V, 1-2.

76) Sapph. *fr.* 58 L-P.

77) *H.Hom.Ven.* 225-7.

78) Apul. *Met.* II, 28.

79) Prop. II, 18,11 speaks of Dawn rather embracing Tithonus adjacently to the Indians.

80) Lyc. 16-9.

abduct Tithonus to Ethiopia⁸¹. And Meleager describes the cicada itself as “Ethiopian”⁸². Ethiopia of course carries emphatic southern connotations, and probably eastern ones too, though the case here is not so simple. For Ethiopia was sometimes held to stretch the breadth of Africa and boast a western coast on the Atlantic: so it did in Euripides’ *Andromeda*, where the sea-monster sped across the Atlantic in anticipation of its meal⁸³. And the Lycophronian *Alexandra* locates Tithonus’ Ethiopian bed near Cerne, a mythical island associated with the Gorgons, whose associations in turn were rather with western Africa and regions adjacent to those of the Graeae, the Hesperides and Atlas⁸⁴. Indeed, in his rationalisation of the Gorgons and the Graeae, the ca. 300 BC Palaephatus locates the Ethiopian island of Cerne in the extreme West, in the Atlantic beyond the pillars of Heracles⁸⁵.

In conclusion, the four big oracles of the dead may have been thought to have been turned, between them, towards all four points of the compass. Amongst these the West was first and foremost, but by no means exclusively.

81) Apollod. III, 12,4.

82) Meleager *AP* VII, 196, 4 = *HE* 4069 Gow-Page.

83) Eur. *TrGF* V F 145.

84) Lyc. 16-9. In Hes. *Th.* 270-83 the Gorgons live “beyond glorious Ocean at the edge of the world near Night”; so too, e.g.: Hdt. II, 91; Paus. III, 17,3. This was certainly the dominant tradition, but not the only one. For the complex picture, see OGDEN 2008, 47-50.

85) Palaeph. 31.

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