

The Titanic Origin of Humans: The Melian Nymphs and Zagreus

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THE FIRST PART of this paper examines a minor mystery in Hesiod's *Theogony*, centering around the Melian Nymphs, in order to assess the suggestions, both ancient and modern, that the Melian Nymphs were the mothers of the human race. The second part examines the afterlife of Hesiod's Melian Nymphs over a thousand years later, in the allegorizing myths of late Neoplatonism, in order to suggest that the Hesiodic myth in which the Melian Nymphs primarily figure, namely the castration of Ouranos, has close similarities to a central Neoplatonic myth, that of Zagreus. Both myths depict a "Titanic" act of destruction and separation which leads to the birth of the human race. Both myths furthermore seek to account for a divine element which human nature retains from its origins.

The Melian Nymphs in Hesiod

ὄσσαι γὰρ ῥαθάμιγγες ἀπέσσυθεν αἱματόεσσαι,
πάσας δέξατο Γαῖα· περιπλομένου δ' ἐνιαυτοῦ
γείνατ' Ἐρινῶς τε κρατερὰς μεγάλους τε Γίγαντας,
τεύχεσι λαμπομένους, δολίχ' ἔγχεα χερσὶν ἔχοντας,
Νύμφας θ' ὡς Μελίας καλέουσ' ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαίαν.

Gaia took in all the bloody drops that spattered off,
and as the seasons of the year turned round
she bore the potent Furies and the Giants, immense,
dazzling in their armor, holding long spears in their hands,
and then she bore the Melian Nymphs on the boundless earth.¹

¹ *Theog.* 183–187. Translations of Hesiod adapted from A. Athanassakis, *Hesiod: Theogony, Works and Days, Shield* (Baltimore 1983).

The appearance of the Melian Nymphs, or “Ash-Tree” Nymphs, in this passage from the *Theogony* has long been a puzzle. Why do innocuous tree nymphs share the same birth as the fearsome Furies and Giants?² Upon closer examination, however, the passage suggests a connection between the Nymphs and the Giants: spears, which the Giants are described as wielding, are very often described in Homer as being made of ash. Homer even uses “ash” (μελίη) by metonymy for “spear.”³ The most famous specimen is of course the mighty spear of Pelian ash which only Achilles can wield.⁴ It therefore seems sensible that the mention of the Giants’ (ashen) spears brings the Melian Nymphs to Hesiod’s mind: the Ash-Tree Nymphs come into existence at the same time as the artifacts associated with them, ashen spears. This is not a new observation; it had already been advanced in the nineteenth century, but seems not to have taken a firm hold in subsequent Hesiodic scholarship.⁵

The Melian Nymphs (or ash-trees) appear again in Hesiod, this time in the *Works and Days* as the progenitors of the Bronze race (143–147):

Ζεὺς δὲ πατὴρ τρίτον ἄλλο γένος μερόπων ἀνθρώπων
χάλκειον ποίησ’, οὐκ ἀργυρέω οὐδὲν ὁμοῖον,

²See for example Athanassakis (*supra* n.1) 43: “It is not clear why the Ash Tree Nymphs are singled out. The birth of nymphs provides a transition from the birth of savage creatures to the birth of someone as lovely as Aphrodite.”

³*E.g. Il.* 2.542; 16.143 = 19.390; 20.277, 322; 21.162, 169, 174; 22.132, 225, 328.

⁴*Il.* 19.389–391: ἀλλά μιν οἶος ἐπίστατο πῆλαι Ἀχιλλεύς, / Πηλιάδα μελίην, τὴν πατρὶ φίλω πόρε Χείρων / Πηλίου ἐκ κορυφῆς, φόνον ἔμμεναι ἠρώεσσιν.

⁵G. Schoemann, *Die Hesiodische Theogonie* (Berlin 1868) 117, notes the view of Preller, who asserted that the Melian Nymphs are “Dämonen der Rache,” and that the Bronze race are born from them (*Op.* 145), “weil nämlich der Schaft der blutigen Stosslanze gewöhnlich von der Esche genommen wurde.” Schoemann prefers the (not necessarily contradictory) view that Hesiod is influenced by traditional stories of the first men being born from trees. Likewise, M. L. West, *Hesiod: Theogony* (Oxford 1966) 221, mentions the view of Sittl, who in his 1889 commentary used “[t]he fact that lethal spears can be made of ash-wood to explain the birth of the Meliai.” West himself finds more promise in a parallel from Near Eastern mythology, namely “the growth of an almond tree from the severed genitals of the Phrygian Agdistis.”

ἐκ μελιᾶν, δεινόν τε καὶ ὄβριμον· οἶσιν Ἴαρος
 ἔργ' ἔμελε στονόεντα καὶ ὕβριες, οὐδέ τι σῖτον
 ἦσθιον, ἀλλ' ἀδάμαντος ἔχον κρατερόφρονα θυμόν.

Zeus the father made a third age of mortals,
 this time of bronze, not at all like the silver one.
 Fashioned from ash trees, they were dreadful and mighty
 and bent on the harsh deeds of war and violence;
 they ate no bread and their hearts were strong as adamant.

It is important to note that the Bronze race is not *made* from bronze, as is often assumed, but named for their exclusive use of bronze implements and weaponry.⁶ They have been plausibly identified as the race of pre-Homeric heroes (*e.g.*, Heracles), in which case the subsequent (Homeric) Age of Heroes and (modern) Age of Iron are inferior variations of the same stock. This broad threefold scheme (gold/silver/bronze-heroes-iron), probably suggested by epic sources,⁷ is more convincing than the usual idea that Hesiod awkwardly grafted a Homeric “Age of Heroes” onto a metallic “Ages of Man” scheme borrowed from the Near East.⁸ It is interesting that bronze and ash (in the form of spears) are also linked closely together in Homer: so μελίην εὔχαλκον (*Il.* 20.322) and the famous “bronze-tongued ash” (22.225, μελίης χαλκογλώχινος). Especially with such an anthropomorphizing Homeric reference in mind, we get the im-

⁶G. Most, “Hesiod’s Myth of the Five (or Three or Four) Races,” *PCPS* 43 (1998: hereafter “Most”) 110: “Presumably Hesiod chose to underscore so dramatically that the bronze men used bronze implements in order to indicate unmistakably that they were called bronze for this very reason.”

⁷Most 124: “epic conceptions and the inspection of his own world could easily have supplied Hesiod with the basic scheme of three succeeding races of men: an early breed of wild warriors who knew only bronze, then the heroes who fought at Troy and Thebes ... and finally the men of the present who are familiar with iron.”

⁸See, typically, J. Barron, “Hesiod,” in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature* I (Cambridge 1985) 98: “For Hesiod could not square this doctrine of progressive decline with his picture of the Seven against Thebes or the Achaeans before Troy. He therefore intercalated an age of heroes or demigods, non-metallic, between the bronze and the iron.” See Most 107 on the common postulation of an original Near Eastern source for Hesiod’s Ages of Man.

pression of Hesiod's war-loving Bronze race, sprung from ash-trees, as "human spears."

As the offspring of trees or tree-nymphs, the Bronze race are the first "recognizable" human beings in Hesiod's Ages of Man.⁹ Curiously enough, this is the only mention in Hesiod of the origin of man.¹⁰ On the basis of such evidence, West agrees that "Hesiod may have considered [the Melian Nymphs] the mothers of men."¹¹ This is in fact the verdict of the Hesiodic scholia; for example, the scholium for *Theogony* 187 notes of the Melian Nymphs: ἐκ τούτων ἦν τὸ πρῶτον γένος τῶν ἀνθρώπων.¹²

The scholium to *Theogony* 563 again mentions the birth of humans from ash-trees (or ash-tree nymphs). The passage of Hesiod (562–564) reads:

ἐκ τούτου δῆπειτα δόλου μεμνημένος αἰεὶ
οὐκ ἐδίδου μελίησι πυρὸς μένος ἀκαμάτοιο
[θνητοῖς ἀνθρώποις, οἱ ἐπὶ χθονὶ ναιετάουσιν].

[Zeus] thereafter never forgot that he had been beguiled
and never gave to ash trees the power of unwearying fire
to mortal men who live on this earth.

The scholiast understands μελίησι, "ash trees," as referring to mankind, so that the meaning of the passage is really "never gave to *men* the power of unwearying fire." In this case, line 564

⁹Most 109–110: "First, the bronze race, unlike the preceding two races, is said to have arisen ἐκ μελίῶν (145): whether Hesiod means ash-trees or tree-nymphs, he is certainly qualifying the bronze men as the earliest members of the human race to which we too belong." Cf. M. L. West, *Hesiod: Works and Days* (Oxford 1978) 187: "Thus the Bronze race's origin from trees or tree-nymphs identifies them with the first men known to ordinary Greek tradition."

¹⁰G. Scalera McClintock, "L'antica natura titanica. Variazioni sul mito greco della colpa," *Filosofia e Teologia* 9 (1995) 309, refers to the myth of the creation of man as "il 'mito assente' della religione greca."

¹¹West (*supra* n.9) 187.

¹²Text: L. Di Gregorio, *Scholia vetera in Hesiodi Theogoniam* (Milan 1975). Cf. schol. II. 22.127: μελιγενέες πρώην οἱ ἄνθρωποι, as given by Schoemann (*supra* n.5) 118. H. Erbse, *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem V* (Berlin 1977) 295, gives a somewhat different text, however: ἢ ἐπεὶ μελιγενεῖς λέγονται οἱ πρώην ἄνδρες καὶ (λαοὶ) ἀπὸ τῶν λίθων Δευκαλίωνος.

serves merely as an elaboration upon μελίησι. The scholiast explains that Hesiod uses μελίησι as shorthand for μελιηγενής, “either because men first sprang from the Melian nymphs, or because, when they were born, they cast themselves under the ash trees, that is, the trees.”¹³ Apollonius Rhodius designates the bronze guardian of Crete, Talos, as the last survivor of this race: “Among the generation of demi-gods he was the last survivor of the bronze race of men born from ash-trees” (μελιηγενέων ἀνθρώπων).¹⁴ Finally, returning to Hesiod, the mention of the ἀνθρώπων τε γένος κρατερῶν τε Γιγάντων at *Theogony* 50 suggests that humans have a common bond with Giants;¹⁵ that bond may well be the Melian Nymphs.¹⁶

Therefore, it appears that Hesiod has made use of an old tradition in which the earliest human beings came from trees. Perhaps under the influence of the constant pairing of “ash” with “bronze” in Homer, he makes his warlike Bronze race, the first recognizably human race, the offspring of ash-trees. Hesiod also has the spirits of ash-trees themselves, the Melian Nymphs, spring into bloody existence at the first mention of spears, along with their more obviously violent siblings, the Giants and the Furies.

Neoplatonism and the Melian Nymphs

In the vastly different world of late Neoplatonism in the fifth and sixth centuries, pagan scholars were concerned with de-

¹³Schol. *Theog.* 563: ἀντὶ τοῦ μελιηγενῆς ἢ ἀπὸ τινος Μελίας οὕτω καλουμένης. ἄλλως· ἢ ὅτι ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐκ Μελιῶν νυμφῶν ἐγεννῶντο οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἢ ὅτι γεννώμενοι ἐρρίπτοντο ὑπὸ ταῖς μελίαις, ἤτοι τοῖς δένδροις.

¹⁴Transl. R. Hunter, *Apollonius of Rhodes* (Oxford 1998). *Argon.* 4.1641–42: τὸν μὲν, χαλκείης μελιηγενέων ἀνθρώπων / ῥίζης λοιπὸν ἔοντα μετ’ ἀνδράσιν ἡμιθέοισιν.

¹⁵Most 112 cites this line as an example of the restricted use of γένος to indicate “what we would call a biological species so as to distinguish it implicitly or explicitly from other species.”

¹⁶J. Strauss Clay, “What the Muses Sang: *Theogony* 1–115,” *GRBS* 29 (1988) 329–330: “these Giants in union with the Meliai are the ancestors of the human race.” Cf. Schoemann (*supra* n.5) 116 n.1 on *Theog.* 50 (quoting Hermann): “non videtur dubium esse, quin hominum originem et generatores dicere voluerit.”

fending the entire classical tradition against the advancing tide of Christianity. The apparent clash between Plato and the poetic tradition was resolved through allegorical readings of Homer and Hesiod,¹⁷ which often seem quite fanciful to our eyes.¹⁸ The Neoplatonists' creative treatment of such authors was justified by their metaphysics: since language is a fragmented way to represent a fragmented world,¹⁹ literary texts can and should be manipulated to better reflect the transcendent unified reality.²⁰ Thus inspired poets represented the same truth as Plato and Aristotle, but in veiled words that only the properly initiated philosopher could penetrate.²¹ So Homer, Hesiod, Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, were all transformed into Neoplatonic philosophers.²²

Etymological resemblance was a favorite tool by which Neo-

¹⁷R. Van Den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns* (Leiden 2001) 93: "In [the Neoplatonists'] efforts to save Homer and Hesiod they resorted to an allegorical reading of their poetry, which neutralized offensive elements and turned the old poets into state of the art Neoplatonic philosophers instead."

¹⁸R. Lambertson, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley 1986: hereafter "Lamberton") 164, comments on Proclus' "extraordinary willingness to depart extravagantly from the most obvious meaning of the text and to apply to Homer's words interpretations that satisfy his own demands but jar our expectations."

¹⁹Lamberton 170–171: "The salient characteristic of the image of reality projected by language as we know it is, then, fragmentation"; cf. 169 n.21: "all that is known is already fragmented."

²⁰Lamberton 170: "If the text appears to violate known truths believed to be represented in it, then the failure must lie in the inadequacies of the fragmented account itself, and the text is easily twisted and even ignored in favor of a synthetic effort to go beyond it and demonstrate the correspondences between myth and reality."

²¹Proclus *In Remp.* I 74.20–24 Kroll: "[t]hat is exactly what lends the myths their special excellence, the fact that they bring nothing of the truth out among the profane, but that they just extend some traces of the complete mystagogy to those who are by nature capable of being led towards the contemplation inaccessible to the masses" (transl. Van Den Berg).

²²Lamberton 177: "there is every reason to believe that [Proclus] felt that Orpheus, Homer, Hesiod, and the [Chaldaean] *Oracles* all tapped a single tradition of wisdom that was also represented in different form in Pythagoras and Plato."

platonists excavated the hidden meaning of a text,²³ and the connection between linguistic sign and referent was by no means casual.²⁴ For example, Proclus is probably drawing upon Hesiod's own etymologizing of "Titan" from τιταίνω ("stretch"),²⁵ in commenting on the Titans' division of Zagreus' limbs: ἡ ψυχὴ ... τέταται [from τείνω] δι' αὐτοῦ παντός.²⁶ Proclus also draws on Plato's etymology of "Hera" in the *Cratylus*²⁷ as supporting his own interpretation, based on the verb ἐρᾶν.²⁸ In fact, Sheppard observes that "[r]ead seriously, the *Cratylus* is splendidly Neoplatonic."²⁹

Proclus' scrutiny of the name of Hera is part of the interpretation of a larger scene from the *Iliad*, the "seduction of Zeus," which sorely tested the ingenuity of the Neoplatonic allegorists. In another etymological triumph associated with this episode, Mt Ida (Ἰδη) was identified with the realm of ideas (ὁ τῶν ἰδεῶν τόπος).³⁰ The basic plot of the *Iliad* was fair game as well: consider the significance of the name of Troy, Ilion (Ἴλιον). This name, given late Greek pronunciation, became assimilated to ὕλη, "matter" (now pronounced /*ili*/).³¹ Helen is the worldly

²³Lamberton 214: "One of the ways that inspired poetry has symbols indicate to what they refer is through etymological hints."

²⁴Lamberton 166: "Proclus himself accepts the idea, which he attributes to Cratylus and to Socrates, that there is a natural relationship between things and their names. The linguistic sign, then, is in no sense arbitrary."

²⁵*Theog.* 207–210: τοὺς δὲ πατὴρ Τιτῆνας ἐπὶ κλησὶν καλέεσκε / παῖδας νεικείων μέγας Οὐρανὸς οὗς τέκεν αὐτός· / φάσκε δὲ τιταίνοντας ἀτασθαλίῃ μέγα ῥέξαι / ἔργον, τοῖο δ' ἔπειτα τίσιν μετόπισθεν ἔσεσθαι.

²⁶Proclus *In Ti.* II 145.18 Diehl [Kern, *Orph.frag.* 210].

²⁷*Cra.* 404B9–C1: "Ἡρα δὲ ἐρατὴ τις, ὥσπερ οὖν καὶ λέγεται ὁ Ζεὺς αὐτῆς ἐρασθεῖς ἔχειν.

²⁸*In Remp.* I 133.14–15: καὶ ὁ ἔρωσ οὗτος, ὃν διαφερόντως ἐρᾶν λέγει τῆς "Ἡρας κατὰ ταύτην συμπλοκὴν.

²⁹A. Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays of Proclus' Commentary on the Republic* (Göttingen 1980) 139.

³⁰See Lamberton 212.

³¹Lamberton 132: "From the perspective of the thoroughly ioticized Greek of the fifth century, Ilion (Ἴλιον), whatever else it might be, was clearly the realm of matter, ὕλη, which in Plato's time may have been pronounced *hūle* but now had become *ili*—in the encyclopedia of symbols, the terrestrial equivalent of that sea of matter that dominated the *Odyssey*."

beauty which lures souls away from their true homes to Ilion; thus Proclus and other Neoplatonists interpreted the *Iliad*, at least in part, as “a myth of the descent of souls into matter.”³²

Hesiod’s oblique account of the creation of humans through the Melian Nymphs did not escape the scrutiny of the Neoplatonic allegorists. The story of the castration of Ouranos by Cronos, the very act that gave rise to the Melian Nymphs, had been singled out for especially harsh criticism by Plato in the *Republic*. At best, Socrates declares, it should be made “accessible only to a few,” and only after they have made an expensive sacrifice (*Resp.* 378A). The Neoplatonists, however, reconciled the poet and the philosopher by recourse to allegorical truths hidden beneath the surface of Hesiod’s narrative.

The favored Neoplatonic interpretation of the castration of Ouranos was that it represented separation, the division of primordial unity into the plurality of the material world. Rappe notes that this myth refers to “the separative monad.”³³ Proclus puts it in typically Neoplatonic terms: “indeed, Ouranos, being of a unifying nature, transcended in simplicity both the divisions of Cronos and the entire perceptible hypostasis, and leads forth from himself the entire Titanic *genesis*.”³⁴ Here, “Titanic” obviously means “manifold”; the Titans as the principle of separation are responsible for the world of plurality. As such, they are considered by Neoplatonists as the begetters of all living things,³⁵ especially humans. The *Hymn to the Titans* (*Hymn. Orph.* 37) first hails them as ἡμετέρων πρόγονοι πατέρων, then as the origins of “all much-laboring mortals,” then finally as the

³²See the discussion in Lambertson 199–200.

³³S. Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius* (Cambridge 2000) 162.

³⁴*In Cra.* 110: ὁ γοῦν Οὐρανὸς συνεκτικῆς ὄν φύσεως ὑπερήπλωται μὲν καὶ τῶν Κρονίων διακόσμων καὶ πάσης τῆς νοεράς ὑποστάσεως, καὶ παράγει ἄφ’ ἑαυτοῦ πᾶσάν τε τὴν Τιτανικὴν γένεσιν.

³⁵As observed by R. Edmonds, “Tearing apart the Zagreus Myth: A Few Disparaging Remarks on Orphism and Original Sin,” *CIAnt* 18 (1999: hereafter “Edmonds”) 56, though in connection with the Zagreus myth.

origins of other creatures: ἀρχαὶ καὶ πηγαὶ πάντων θνητῶν πολυμόχθων / εἰναλίων πτηνῶν τε καὶ οἷ χθόνα ναιετάουσιν. It should also be noted that the Neoplatonists give no sign of considering this Titanic principle as evil.³⁶ On the contrary, the whole point of the Neoplatonic allegorizing of myths is to clear divinity of any such evil actions.

Proclus also refers more specifically to the Hesiodic succession myth: “indeed, the mythographers make a noise speaking about the cuttings of Ouranos and Cronos; the reason being that Ouranos is of the unifying order, Cronos of the Titanic order, and Zeus of the demiurgic; and the Titanic race delights in separation and difference ... and so Cronos, as a dividing god, separates his kingship from that of Ouranos.”³⁷ Hence the castration of Ouranos, interpreted allegorically, displays the same pattern as the more famous Neoplatonic myth, that of Zagreus:³⁸ a Titan or Titans perform a violent act of separation upon the ruling deity of the universe,³⁹ creating the Many from the One. We will also examine presently how both myths account for the origin of humans from this violent, “Titanic” act.

In the Zagreus myth, the Titans kill and dismember the infant Dionysus (Zagreus); Zeus punishes the Titans by incinerating them, and humans are born from the resulting ashes. The Neo-

³⁶As modern scholars often do; for example, I. M. Linforth, *The Arts of Orpheus* (Berkeley 1941) 320, in spite of his generally cautious approach to the Zagreus myth, states that “the Titans represent the evil principle of division” (cited by Edmonds 52).

³⁷*In Cra.* 111: θρυλοῦσι γοῦν οἱ μυθοπλάσται Οὐρανίας τομὰς καὶ Κρονίας λέγοντες· τὸ δ’ αἴτιον, ὅτι συνεκτικῆς μὲν ἐστὶν τάξεως ὁ Οὐρανός, Τιτανικῆς δ’ ὁ Κρόνος, δημιουργικῆς ὁ Ζεὺς· τὸ δ’ αὖ Τιτανικὸν γένος διακρίσει χαίρει καὶ ἐτερότησι ... ὁ τοίνυν Κρόνος ὡς διαιρετικὸς θεὸς χωρίζει τὴν ἑαυτοῦ βασιλείαν ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ. Cf. also *In Remp* I 82.16–18: αἱ δὲ τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ τομαὶ τὴν διάκρισιν τῆς Τιτανικῆς σειρᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς συνεκτικῆς διακοσμήσεως αἰνίσσονται.

³⁸As Edmonds observes (37 n.6), the name “Zagreus” in this context seems to be a modern coinage; he dates it to Lobeck in 1829. It is used in this paper as a convenient shorthand for “the Orphic-Neoplatonic Dionysus.”

³⁹Olympiodorus (*In Phaed.* 1.1.3) gives a succession of four rulers of the universe: Ouranos, Cronos, Zeus, and Dionysus. Proclus (*In Ti.* III 168.15 [*Orph. frag.* 107]) assigns six rulers to Orpheus: Phanes, Night, Ouranos, Cronos, Zeus, and Dionysus.

platonists, who are in fact our greatest source for Orphic fragments,⁴⁰ supposed this myth to be of Orphic origin. A typical version of the myth, as summarized by Morford and Lenardon:

Zeus mated with his daughter Persephone, who bore a son, Zagreus, which is another name for Dionysus. In her jealousy, Hera then aroused the Titans to attack the child. These monstrous beings, their faces whitened with chalk, attacked the infant as he was looking in a mirror⁴¹ (in another version, they beguiled him with toys and cut him to pieces with knives). After the murder, the Titans devoured the dismembered corpse. But the heart of the infant god was saved and brought to Zeus by Athena, and Dionysus was born again—swallowed by Zeus and begotten on Semele. Zeus was angry with the Titans and destroyed them with his thunder and lightning; but from their ashes mankind was born.⁴²

On the cosmic level, the devouring of Dionysus' limbs by the Titans represents the generation of the material Many from the immaterial One.⁴³ Proclus equates the division of Dionysus' body into seven parts by the Titans with the *Timaeus*' division of the world-soul into seven parts.⁴⁴ At the human level, the Zagreus myth explains the fragmented nature of human

⁴⁰According to Rappe (*supra* n.33) 157, Proclus is "by far the richest source in sheer number of fragments."

⁴¹This aspect of the Zagreus myth is also interpreted as an allegory for the dispersal of the soul into the material world, at both the cosmic and the human level. Plotinus (*Enn.* 4.3.12) famously describes this scene at the human level: "the souls of humans, having seen their images as in the mirror of Dionysus, became there (ἐκεῖ ἐγένοντο, *i.e.* where the images are), having leapt from above." Proclus (*In Ti.* II 8.19) interprets the scene at the cosmic level: "Dionysos sees his own image in the mirror and goes out into the whole divided creation" (transl. R. Seaford, "In the Mirror of Dionysos," in S. Blundell and M. Williamson, edd., *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece* [London 1998] 142.)

⁴²M. Morford and R. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*⁶ (New York 1999) 223–224; cited also by Edmonds 36.

⁴³Edmonds 56: "Olympiodorus and other Neoplatonists see the myth of dismemberment as an allegory for the creation of the manifold material world out of divine unity by the action of the Titans, the forces of division."

⁴⁴Proclus *In Ti.* II 146.12–14 (referring to *Ti.* 35A): ἐπτά δὲ πάντα κούρου διαιρέσαντο, φησὶν ὁ θεολόγος περὶ τῶν Τιτάνων, καθάπερ καὶ ὁ Τίμαιος εἰς ἐπτά διαιρεῖ μοίρας αὐτήν.

thought.⁴⁵ The Titans can also represent the forces of separation and fragmentation on the level of the individual soul: τὰ πάθη and αἱ ἄλογοι δυνάμεις “plot against” τῇ λογικῇ ζωῇ, rejoicing in tearing it apart τιτανικῶς (Proclus *In I Alc.* 43 [*Orph.frag.* 210]). The Titans, as forces of separation, are often shown as opposing the One, especially in their battle with the Olympians. This struggle is so fundamental to Neoplatonic metaphysics that Proclus even interprets the war between Athens and Atlantis, described in Plato’s *Timaeus*, in these terms—the Athenians standing in for the Olympians, and the Atlantideans for the Titans.⁴⁶

Edmonds has written that the only explicit mention in an ancient source of the birth of humans from the Titans, after they have consumed the infant Dionysus, is in the sixth-century Neoplatonist Olympiodorus.⁴⁷ Perhaps, however, there is a slightly earlier, slightly veiled reference to the story in the following “Orphic” account of the races of man, given by Proclus (*In Remp.* II 74–75 [*Orph.frag.* 140]):

ὁ μὲν θεολόγος Ὀρφεὺς τρία γένη παραδέδωκεν ἀνθρώπων· πρῶτιστον τὸ χρυσοῦν, ὅπερ ὑποστήσαι τὸν Φάνητά φησιν· δεύτερον τὸ ἀργυροῦν, οὗ φησιν ἄρξαι τὸν μέγιστον Κρόνον· τρίτον τὸ Τιτανικόν, ὃ φησιν ἐκ τῶν Τιτανικῶν μελῶν τὸν Δία συστήσασθαι· συννοήσας ὡς ἐν τρισὶν ὅροις τούτοις πᾶν εἶδος περιέχεται τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ζωῆς.

⁴⁵Rappe (*supra* n.33) 165: “According to Proclus, the divided soul of Dionysus explains why the human soul operates as it does, in a divided way, discursively.” She goes on to cite Proclus’ *In Parmenidem* 809: “It is therefore appropriate that soul should have the function of division and of seeing things discursively. It is no wonder, then, that whereas the divine Forms exist primordially together and unified in the demiurgic intellect, our soul attacks them separately” (transl. G. R. Morrow and J. M. Dillon, *Proclus’ Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides* [Princeton 1987] 174).

⁴⁶See for example *In Ti.* I 187.4 [*Orph.frag.* 120].

⁴⁷Edmonds 38: “The anthropogony, the supposedly crucial element in the myth of Zagreus, is, in fact, only found combined with the tales of the *sparagmos* and the punishment of the Titans in a single Neoplatonic commentary [Olympiod. *In Phaed.* 1.1.3 (*Orph.frag.* 220)] that dates to the sixth century of the Christian era.”

Orpheus the theologian has handed down three races of man: first the golden, which he says Phanes governed; second the silver, which he says the mighty Kronos ruled; third the Titanic, which he says Zeus assembled from the Titanic limbs; thinking that in these three categories every form of human life was included.

Proclus goes on explicitly to compare this “Orphic” account with Hesiod’s Races of Man (*Op.* 110–201). Although Hesiod has five races to Orpheus’ three, the parallels are quite striking. In both there is a steady decline from the Gold race, to the Silver, then to a third race, identified by Hesiod as the Bronze, by Orpheus as the “Titanic.” As argued above, Hesiod’s Bronze race (*Op.* 143–147) originated from the Melian Nymphs of *Theogony* 183–187. This third race, in both the Hesiodic and Orphic accounts, is the first recognizably “human” one, *i.e.*, they are the ancestors of the modern human race. In the Orphic account, the epithet “Titanic,” along with the statement that Zeus assembled this race “from the Titanic limbs,” seems a transparent reference to the myth of Zagreus. Kern evidently thought so, referring the reader of this fragment to Olympiodorus’ account of the Zagreus myth (*Orph.frag.* 235).⁴⁸ Hence the creation of the “Titanic” race signifies the descent of the human soul into the world of the Many, that is, matter. As Olympiodorus observes, “we are bound in matter like Titans.”⁴⁹

The “Titanic limbs” from which the third race is made in Proclus’ Orphic account pose a puzzle, however; for it is Dionysus who is dismembered in the myth, not the Titans. Moreover, Olympiodorus claims that humans were created from the “sublimate of vapors” of the incinerated Titans, not their

⁴⁸L. Brisson, “Proclus et l’Orphisme,” in *Proclus: lecteur et interprète des anciens* (Paris 1987) 68, also explicitly identifies the humans of the Zagreus myth with the Orphic third race in Proclus’ account: “Or, de la suie déposée par la fumée dégagée par la combustion des Titans, est née une troisième d’hommes, la nôtre, qui participe pour une part des Titans et pour une autre de Dionysos.”

⁴⁹Olympiodorus *In Phaed.* 1.8.7 ad 68C: καὶ γὰρ ἐνδούμεθα μὲν τῇ ὕλῃ ὡς Τιτᾶνες.

limbs.⁵⁰ I suggest that with the idea of separation and division being paramount for Proclus, he uses the adjective “Titanic” to refer to the very epitome of these forces—the Titans—even if the limbs in question belong to Dionysus.⁵¹ The “limbs,” arguably, are the very essence of the Zagreus myth, symbolizing the segmentation and dispersal of both the world soul into the cosmos, and of the human soul into the body.

To summarize, there are several major structural similarities between the Hesiodic myth of the castration of Ouranos, giving rise to the Melian Nymphs and thence to men, and the “Orphic” myth of Zagreus giving rise to the “Titanic” race of men, as given by Olympiodorus and Proclus. In both cases, a Titan or Titans dismember the ruling deity of the cosmos. For the Neoplatonists, both of these Titanic acts of dismemberment represented the separation of the One into the Many. In both cases, humans arise from this Titanic act of violence: through the Melian Nymphs in the Hesiodic account, and from the Titans themselves in the Orphic account. In both the Hesiodic and the Orphic myths, this race of men is the third in succession after the Gold and Silver races. In both, this race retains both divine and Titanic elements: the Bronze race (through the Melian Nymphs) are the descendants of Ouranos, the ruler of the Titans; the “Titanic” race is “assembled” from the Titans, and have in addition a “Dionysiac” element. Furthermore, the divine element in both the Bronze and Titanic races is derived from the ruler of the cosmos.

The great truth of the separation of the One into the Many, like the gods themselves, leaves “processions” of lesser incar-

⁵⁰ Olympiodorus *In Phaed.* 1.1.3 [*Orph.frag.* 220]: “from the sublimate of the vapors (ἐκ τῆς αἰθάλης τῶν ἀτιμῶν) that rise from [the Titans] comes the matter (ύλης) from which men are created” (transl. Edmonds 40). Olympiodorus, moreover, had his own alchemical reasons for insisting on an αἰθάλη: see Edmonds 41 (following Brisson).

⁵¹ Cf. Proclus’ use of the phrase “Titanic *genesis*” (*supra* n.34) and the adverb “titanically” (τιτανικῶς) at *In Ti.* II 197.24.

nations in its wake,⁵² in the form of allegories embedded in the great texts of the past. The myth of Zagreus refers to this truth (twice),⁵³ as does the castration of Ouranos, the siege of Troy in the *Iliad*, and the Titanomachy (even further allegorized, according to Proclus, as the war of Athens against Atlantis in Plato's *Laws*). This primordial division of One into Many also entailed the birth of humans, as soul fell into the world of matter. This detail receives special attention in the myths of Zagreus and the castration of Ouranos, through his offspring the Melian Nymphs.

I would, moreover, venture a suggestion on Proclus' text of the Orphic races of man, quoted above (*In Remp.* II 74.26–75.2), observing that Proclus' phrase ἐκ τῶν Τιτανικῶν μελῶν is remarkably similar to Hesiod's ἐκ μελιᾶν (*Op.* 145). The similarity is even more remarkable when it is considered that Hesiod's phrase, in Attic, would be ἐκ μελιῶν. Perhaps Proclus understood the fashioning of Hesiod's Bronze race "from the Ash-tree Nymphs" as a nearly transparent allegory for "from the (Titanic) limbs." We have already noted the structural similarities between the Hesiodic and Orphic accounts, including the fact that both the Bronze and "Titanic" races come third, after the Gold and Silver. This makes the possibility of a hidden etymological link between the two accounts all the more enticing (for a Neoplatonist).

The Titans were closely associated with matter (ύλη) by the Neoplatonists. We have seen that the Titans represent the principle of separation, in particular the separation of the One into the Many. Another aspect of this separation is the going

⁵²Lamberton 163: "At the highest level, of course, is the One, followed by the monad and the dyad, then by a large number of 'henads', sometimes associated with the Olympian pantheon. These in turn are the sources of various 'processions' of lesser spiritual entities, down to the extremely complex and cluttered level of 'appearances'; individual human beings also belonged to the procession of an Olympian god as well.

⁵³Once through the infant Zagreus looking in the mirror, once through the *sparagmos* of Zagreus by the Titans.

forth of soul into the world of matter,⁵⁴ *i.e.*, the creation of humans. Olympiodorus comments on the Titans who attacked Zagreus (*In Phaed.* 1.1.3 [*Orph.frag.* 220]): ἐξ αὐτῶν ὕλης γενομένης γενέσθαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, practically identifying the creation of matter with the creation of human beings, and both with the Titans. In a passage already cited (*In Phaed.* 1.8.7) Olympiodorus further declares that “we are bound in matter like Titans,” because of the separation of the One: καὶ γὰρ ἐνδούμεθα μὲν τῇ ὕλῃ ὡς Τιτᾶνες διὰ τὸν πολλὸν μερισμὸν· πολὺ γὰρ τὸ ἐμὸν καὶ σόν. Separation is inextricably linked to matter and to the creation of humans.

Returning to the Melian Nymphs, we should consider the original, literal meaning of ὕλη: “wood.” This meaning, though by late antiquity yielding place to “matter,” was certainly known to the Neoplatonists: could the origin of humans from tree-nymphs be yet another expression of the close association of the genesis of humans with the world of matter? Finally, we may consider that as ash-trees stood at the beginning of human life in the “Hesiodic” myth, so does a cypress tree stand at the end of life for the Orphic initiate of the gold leaf from Hipponion, dated *ca* 400 B.C.:⁵⁵

εὐρήσσεις δ' Ἀίδαο δόμων ἐπ' ἀριστερὰ κρήνην,
πὰρ δ' αὐτῇι λευκὴν ἐστηκυῖαν κυπάρισσον·

And furthermore, this initiate is to identify herself as a Titan (6–7):

εἶπεν· “Γῆς παῖς εἰμι καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος,⁵⁶
αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ γένος οὐράνιον· τόδε δ' ἴστε καὶ αὐτοί.”

She claims, however, to be of the “Ouranian race,” which to a

⁵⁴Proclus (*in Ti.* I 176.20–21) equates the Titanic race with the dyad, under which are grouped ἑτερότης, κίνησις, ἄλογον, ὕλη.

⁵⁵*Orph.frag.* 32.a.1–2. I am grateful to the anonymous reader for this reference.

⁵⁶*Cf. Hymn.Orph.* 37.1: Τιτῆνες, Γαίης τε καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἀγλαὰ τέκνα.

late Neoplatonist, at least, would signify belonging to the primordial unity.

Neoplatonic allegory served to confine the true significance of ancient texts to a privileged (and properly educated)⁵⁷ few. Proclus in fact wishes that almost none of ancient Greek literature had survived: “If I were master, the only ones of all the ancient books I would have people read would be the Chaldaean oracles and the *Timaeus*, and I would do away with all the others for the men of our time, because they harm some of those who approach them casually and without due examination.”⁵⁸ To an expert like Proclus, the story of the division of the One into the Many, and all that it entailed, is told over and over again by the ancients, who screened this truth from uninitiated eyes through allegory. Perhaps even such an allegorical expert as Proclus, however, would be encouraged by the resemblance between μελιῶν and μελῶν, confirming that the same great truth is hidden in the stories of two of his most revered authorities, Hesiod and Orpheus.⁵⁹

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⁵⁷L. Siorvanes, *Proclus: Neoplatonic Philosophy and Science* (Edinburgh 1996) 114–121, describes the Neoplatonic curriculum, which consisted of at least six years devoted to “higher education” (beyond rhetoric and grammar). Cf. Sheppard (*supra* n.29) 149: “Mysteries were revealed only to initiates and Proclus makes it clear that his allegories are similarly exclusive and that only those with proper training can understand the Homeric myths aright.”

⁵⁸Quoted in Marinus *Vita Procli* 38 (transl. Lambertson 175).

⁵⁹I would like to express my gratitude to the editors, to the anonymous readers of two versions of this paper, and to Andrew Zissos.