



Orphism and Grafitti from Olbia

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ORPHISM AND GRAFITTI FROM OLBIA*

The history of ancient Greek religion fortunately belongs to that branch of classical studies, that develops not only through lasting discussions, but also thanks to the discovery of some new material, which sometimes resolves old arguments. So the finds of the last years that concern Orphism make us turn once more to some disputed questions that have for a long time interested the students of this religious movement.

While the excavations in Italy added to already known Orphic golden plates one more of the same type¹, A. S. RUSJAEVA's publication of Orphic graffiti from Olbia (Vth century B.C.)² was much more interesting. The graffiti rather quickly became known to the European scholars³ who offered their own interpretations⁴. The interest in Olbian graffiti is quite clear: though, unlike the Italian ones, they contain only several fragmentary words, they are far more significant than just the regional evidence.

In the upper part of the first plate the words βίος θάνατος βίος ἀλήθεια are engraved, in the lower part – Διό(νυσος) or Διο(νύσω) ὄρφικοί. The last words are especially important for us, but before I try to analyse this evidence, it should be noted that the second omicron in the word ὄρφικοί is engraved indistinctly, its lines are not closed below⁵. That made M. L. WEST presume it to be omega (Ω) and not omicron, and read Διονύσω ὄρφικῶι or ὄρφικῶν respectively⁶.

The reason for objecting to this are the following: 1) the lines of the first omicron are also not closed, but above, and not below; 2) the lines of the second omicron are not secluded most probably due to the irregularity of the plate just under this letter; 3) there are no traces of low gaps typical of omega; 4) in this case we have more reasons to trust the editor of the Olbian graffiti and her consultant JURIJ VINOGRADOV, than Mr. WEST, who saw only the photos. That is why I

* This paper was completed during a Humboldt-fellowship at the University of Konstanz.

¹ G. PUGLIESE CARATELLI, *Un sepolcro di Hipponion e un nuovo testo orfico*, P.d.P. 29, 1974. The text of the plate was discussed in the works of H. LLOYD-JONES, M. MARCOVICH, R. MERKEL-BACH, M. GUARDUCCI, M. L. WEST and others.

² A. S. RUSJAEVA, *Orfism i kult Dionisa v Olvii*, *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii*, N 1, 1978.

³ F. TINNEFELD, *Referat über zwei Russische Aufsätze*, ZPE 38, 1980.

⁴ W. BURKERT, *Neue Funde zur Orphic*, *Information zum altsprachlichen Unterricht*, II.2, 1980; M. L. WEST, *The Orphics in Olbia*, ZPE 45, 1982.

⁵ RUSJAEVA, *Op. cit.* fig. 1.

⁶ West, *Op. cit.* 22.

prefer the first reading. Moreover, the epithet ὄρφικός is not attested in connection to Dionysus, and the variant with gen. plur. ὄρφικῶν has the same sense as nom. plur. ὄρφικοί: (to) Dionysus (from) Orphics.

In his new book WEST reproduces the inscription already in the following way: »Dio(nysus), Orphic ()«. In essence, it is not a new reading of the text, but the refusal of such a reading. Most probably, the matter is not the difficulties of interpretation, but the need to bring the Olbian material into correspondence with WEST's general views on the nature of Orphism. Then West notes: »It is not clear, whether the word 'Orphic' is being applied to Dionysus, to the votaries, or to the rites, but it comes to the same thing«⁷. So he tends to equate both readings: »(to) Dionysus Orphic« and »(to) Dionysus (from) Orphics«. But obviously the meaning and respectively the historical significance of this evidence in these two cases are far from being the same. In the first, cut variant, we have the fact of existence of Dionysiac-Orphic cult in Olbia, which extends significantly our knowledge about geographical spread of Orphism in that period. In the second case we actually receive for the first time a reliable affirmation to the idea that the religious communities, the members of which called themselves Orphics, existed already in the Vth century B. C.⁸.

This very point is in the centre of long discussions about Orphism: whether it was a religious movement, and Orphic communities and people who called themselves Orphics really existed, or we have a right to speak only about Orphic religious literature, Orphic purifications rites, etc.?

The following example demonstrates how opposite are the positions in this debate: while U. BIANCHI called his article »L'orphisme a existé«⁹, WEST began his talk at the VIth International Congress of Classical Studies with the words: »There is no such thing as Orphism«¹⁰.

The beginning of radical scepticism in this field is connected with the name of U. VON WILAMOWITZ-MOELLENDORFF. Obviously, there was no unanimity here long before him: it is not difficult to see the difference between the approach of V. MACCHIORO, who imagined Orphic religion as quite unsimilar to Greek polytheism, with its own founder, holy book, theology¹¹, or that of J. HARRISON, for whom omophagia on Crete, Eleusinian mysteries, and »sacred marriage« in

⁷ M. L. WEST, *The Orphic Poems*, Oxford 1983, 18.

⁸ Earlier WEST noted: »the reading is not of crucial importance: in any case we are entitled to call the owners of these little tablets Orphics« (Orphics in Olbia, 22). In this case it is more important that they called Orphics themselves.

⁹ U. BIANCHI, *L'orphisme a existé*, Mélanges H. CH. PUECH, Paris 1974.

¹⁰ M. L. WEST, *Graeco-Oriental Orphism in the Third Century B. C.*, *Travaux du VI^e congrès international d'études classiques*, Paris 1976, 221. See also an interesting discussion in: W. BURKERT, *Orphism and Bacchic Mysteries: New Evidence and Old Problems of Interpretation*, Protocol of the 28th Colloquy of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies, Berkeley 1977.

¹¹ V. MACCHIORO, *Zagreus. Studi intorno all'orfismo*, Firenze 1929.

Athens were also Orphic¹², on the one hand, and more careful and sober interpretations of O. GRUPPE¹³, E. ROHDE¹⁴, and O. KERN¹⁵, on the other. A great number of problems remained unsolved and rather controversial, nobody however doubted that Orphism existed, with all those peculiarities that made it so different from »usual« Greek religion.

WILAMOWITZ in his last book offered quite opposite view. Metempsychosis was introduced not by Orphics, but by Pythagoras, as for Orphic soul doctrine, its existence had yet to be proved. Orphic theogony did exist, but theogony is by no means evidence of some special religion or religious community. Ὀρφεωτελεσταί, mentioned by Theophrastus, are no more, than *Winkelpriester*, earning their living like dream-interpretors, with the help of their books, where purificative procedures are described. Orphism is a term, invented by modern scholars, it was not used in antiquity. The word ὀρφικοί is to be found only once at Apollodorus, while here Epimenides and Musaeus are meant. As for golden plates, they are interesting and important documents, but there are no grounds to call them »Orphic«. And the last: Dionysiac mysteries have nothing to do with Orphics, and Dionysus – with Orphic-Pythagorean ascetism¹⁶.

One cannot assert that WILAMOWITZ' critical pathos could immediately change the situation in this field: W. K. CH. GUTHRIE¹⁷, K. ZIEGLER¹⁸, and M. P. NILSSON¹⁹, who wrote after him, on the whole retained the former position. But the seeds of doubt were not sown in vain, and since the second part of the 1930's a number of books have been published, whose authors seem to do their best to prove theses that appear only in the form of separate remarks in WILAMOWITZ's book.

I. LINFORTH showed in a detailed critical study that early evidence (VI-IV B. C.) connects Orpheus with Apollo, and not with Dionysus – the latter appears to be hostile to Orpheus²⁰. On the basis of a careful analysis LINFORTH has formulated his main conclusion: a unified Orphic religion never existed. »The use of the term 'Orphics' and similar expressions cannot be taken as evidence that there was one Orphic religious institution and one only, of some unity and solidarity, whose members were devoted to a common creed and a common ceremonial. The term has a far wider range and a less precise significance than this«. No ancient author

¹² J. HARRISON, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, Oxford 1903.

¹³ O. GRUPPE, *Griechische Mythologie und Religionsgeschichte I-II*, München 1906.

¹⁴ E. ROHDE, *Psyche. The Cult of Souls among the Greeks*, Oxford 1921.

¹⁵ O. KERN, *Die Religion der Griechen I-III*, Berlin 1928-1938.

¹⁶ U. VON WILAMOWITZ-MOELLENDORFF, *Der Glaube der Hellenen II*, Berlin 1932, 188-202, 378.

¹⁷ W. K. CH. GUTHRIE, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, London 1935.

¹⁸ RE XVIII (1938) s.v. Orpheus.

¹⁹ M. P. NILSSON, *Orphism and Kindred Religious Movements*, H. Th. R. 28 (1935).

²⁰ I. LINFORTH, *The Arts of Orpheus*, Berkeley 1941.

ever names any man an Orphic, LINFORTH pointed out, and the term itself »is so vague and general in its meaning that it has little utility«²¹.

H. LONG in his dissertation, devoted to metempsychosis, develops the idea that Greeks got this doctrine from Pythagoras. Only several pages of appendix are devoted to Orphism in his work and they are full of such scepticism that it remains in fact unclear, whether or no metempsychosis existed in Orphism at least after Pythagoras²².

One of the principal conclusions of L. MOULIGNIER's book was the following: »dans l'état actuelle de nos connaissances, certaine hypothèse nous a semblé inutile: celle de l'existence d'une religion orphique véritable professant une doctrine originale et l'exprimant dans des rites particuliers«²³.

The aim of G. ZUNTZ in his thorough study was to show, the Orphic golden plates are called Orphic only due to a misunderstanding: in fact they belong to Pythagoreans and go back to Egyptian religious beliefs²⁴.

Fr. GRAF, proceeding from the assumption that there were no proper Orphic religious institutions, connects the poems known under Orpheus' name with Eleusinian mysteries and considers this literature to be a kind of doctrinal appendix to those cult ceremonies performed in Eleusis²⁵.

Finally, not long ago appeared M. L. WEST's book, which already with its title (*The Orphic Poems*) makes it clear that he is going to speak of »Orphic literature, not of Orphism or the Orphics«²⁶. Calling the study of Orphism a »pseudo-problem«, WEST supposes that Orphic cults and rituals, Orphic ascetic practice, Orphic literature – all these are heterogeneous phenomena, and it would be wrong to see in it the manifestation of a single religious movement. The only constant factor uniting it is the name of Orpheus, but it could be called upon as an authority by anybody and it was never a monopoly of a special Orphic community or communities²⁷.

Does the new material from Olbia confirm the principal theses of WILAMOWITZ and of those, who supported and developed them? No, we may say definitively. Now it is already impossible to deny the actual connection between Dionysiac cult and Orphism: the name of Dionysus is repeated in all three Olbian graffiti. Cer-

²¹ Ibid. 288–289.

²² H. LONG, *A study of Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Greece from Pythagoras to Plato*, Princeton 1948.

²³ L. MOULIGNIER, *Orphée et l'orphisme à l'époque classique*, Paris 1955, 116.

²⁴ G. ZUNTZ, *Persephone. Three Essays on Religion and Thought in Magna Graecia*, Oxford 1971, 275 f. The closeness of golden plates to Egyptian religion has been noted also by S. LURIA, *Democrit*, Leningrad 1970, 563 ff.

²⁵ Fr. GRAF, *Eleusis und die orphische Dichtung Athens in vorhellenistischer Zeit*, Berlin/New York 1974. GRAF as well as LONG doubted the existence of *Seelenwanderungslehre* in Orphism (Op. cit., 93–94).

²⁶ WEST, *Orphic Poems*, 2.

²⁷ Ibid., 3.

tainly, their owners bore a direct relation to the Olbian cult of Dionysus, known from Herodotus (IV, 79)²⁸.

Properly speaking, these grafitti confirm what could be supposed before: the figure of mythical singer Orpheus was closely connected with Apollo, nevertheless the most important cult divinity of Orphism was Dionysus²⁹. The frequent mention of Orpheus together with Apollo (this was the basis of LINFORTH's conclusion) tells us only that Orphics really had no monopoly on this name. The authors of the V–IV centuries B.C. who mentioned Orpheus were not bound to think at the same time about some Orphic cults – very often they meant the traditional by that time figure of the mythical poet and singer, who was naturally drawn toward Apollo.

Particularly essential is that the evidence of Olbian grafitti concerns the cult practice of Orphics, about which, unfortunately, we know least of all. Judging by the preserved Orphic literature (as it is displayed in KERN's collection³⁰), the central place here is occupied by Zeus, who is mentioned more than 100 times, while Dionysus (together with the names of gods identified with him) almost half as often, and Apollo – one eighth as often. But it would be hasty to proclaim Zeus the main Orphic divinity. Here the question is the Orphic mythology and cosmogony, where Zeus really played a very important role³¹ and not their cult practice. The both spheres were connected with each other, of course, but – as the evidence shows – not at all directly.

Contrary to the sceptical conclusions, mentioned above, Olbian grafitti, taken altogether, prove, that in the classical epoch religious communities existed, whose members called themselves Orphics. The absence (or rather lack, as we see later) of clear evidence to this fact was one of the principal arguments of those who denied the existence of Orphism and one of the main difficulties for those, who tried to prove it. So, for instance, GUTHRIE, the author of perhaps the best book on Orphism, being sure of the reality of Orphic religious movement, was compelled to point out: »It would be far from easy to produce certain proof of anything calling itself an Orphic community in fifth or fourth century Greece . . . there may never have existed any body of people to whom it would have occurred to call themselves an Orphic community«³².

Meanwhile, there is one passage in Herodotus (II, 81), which correctly interpreted, tells us about just such a community. Herodotus narrates about the Egyp-

²⁸ On Dionysiac cult in Olbia cf.: A. S. RUSJAEVA, *Zemledelcheskie kultury v Olvii dogetsckogo vremeni*, Kiev 1979, 72 ff.

²⁹ This doesn't mean of course that every Dionysiac cult was Orphic. As GUTHRIE properly remarked, »to assume, that every worshipper of Dionysus was an Orphic is manifestly wrong, but it is equally untrue to say that none was« (GUTHRIE, *Op. cit.* 9).

³⁰ O. KERN, *Orphicorum fragmenta*, Berolini 1922.

³¹ This role is especially manifest in Derveni-papyrus. See: L. ZHMUD', *Orficheskij papirus iz Derveni*, *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii*, N 2, 1983, 120.

³² GUTHRIE, *Op. cit.*, 10–11.

tian prohibition against burying people in woolen clothes. There are two versions of the following sentence: ὁμολογέουσι δὲ ταῦτα τοῖσι Ὀρφικοῖσι καλεομένοισι καὶ Πυθαγορείοισι (Flor.); ὁμολογέει δὲ ταυτα τοῖσι Ὀρφικοῖσι καλεομένοισι καὶ Βακχικοῖσι, ἐοῦσι δὲ Αἰγυπτίοισι καὶ Πυθαγορείοισι (Rom.).

In the first version the point in question is Orphics and Pythagoreans (dat. plur. masc.), in the second (longer) version – Orphic and Bacchic rites, which in fact are Egyptian and Pythagorean (dat. plur. neut.). This passage has been most thoroughly examined by LINFORTH, and though in his time other cases of the usage of οἱ Ὀρφικοί in the Vth century B.C. were not known (unlike τὰ ὄρφικὰ relating to rites and literature), LINFORTH adduced convincing arguments that the long version appeared as a result of interpolation³³. These arguments seem to me especially important, as they contradict LINFORTH's general tendency to deny the existence of Orphic communities. And if BURKERT preferred to accept the long version, emphasizing that »ancient testimonia speak of Ὀρφικά, not Ὀρφικοί«³⁴, after the publication of Olbian finds his argument loses its force. Independent epigraphical evidence demonstrates that at the time of Herodotus Ὀρφικοί did exist and gives the short version additional weight³⁵.

WEST in his book, published even after the appearance of the Olbian finds, gives his preference nevertheless to the long version³⁶, in no way connecting Herodotus' passage with Orphics from Olbia. Admitting the reality of separate Orphic communities in Greece, WEST considers that there were no Orphics »in general«. »We must never say that 'the Orphics' believed this or did that, and anyone who does say it must be asked sharply ›Which Orphics?«³⁷.

WEST's criticism would make sense if he directed it against the adherents of a panhellenic »Orphic union«, with unified organisation, fixed doctrines and rites, holy scripture, etc. But now, as it seems, there are no real followers of this idea,

³³ He referred, particularly, to the passage in Apuleius (Apol. 56), which preserved just the short version (LINFORTH, Op. cit. 38–51). Cf. also: M. TIMPANARO CARDINI, PITAGORICI. Testimonianze e frammenti I, Firenze 1958, 22–23.

³⁴ W. BURKERT, Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism, Cambridge (Mass.) 1972, 127; idem, Le laminette auree: Da Orpheo a Lampono, Orfismo in Magna Grecia, Napoli 1975, 87.

³⁵ Besides all other things, Herodotus could hardly believe, that prohibition against burying in woolen clothes »in fact« was borrowed by Pythagoras in Egypt, and then from Pythagoreans came to Orphics (such is the logic of long version). The historian tells us nothing about Pythagoras' travel to Egypt, but he asserts directly, that prophet Melampous borrowed from the Egyptians the cult of Dionysus (II, 49), and the sages who followed him explained in detail its significance. One can easily recognise in those sages Orpheus and Musaeus (G. RATHMANN, Questiones Pythagoraeae, Orphicae, Empedocleae, Diss. Halle a.S. 1933, 49). Hecataeus of Miletus in a context, that reveals Herodotus' influence, directly speaks of Orpheus' and Musaeus' visit to Egypt (FGrHist 264 F 25, 96 ff.)

³⁶ WEST, Orphic Poems, 8 n. 10. The only reason he gives, is that interpolation is less probable, than shortening.

³⁷ Ibid., 3.

and even in the past they were not so numerous. Admitting many essential differences (quite natural, however, taking into account that unification was by no means proper to Greek religion), scholars tried to find in Orphism some combination of traits, typical just for it, although no one of these traits need be unique to it³⁸. Though there was much more failure than success on this way (mostly because of extreme fragmentary and complicated nature of the accessible sources), one could hardly doubt, that there was certain part in common between Orphic doctrines, way of life of their adherents, and cults they took part in.

It is very revealing that WEST, who sets so strict standards for those who speak of Orphism, with an unexpected lightness and without any ground introduces another term – shamanism. »The word 'shaman' . . . serves as a convenient designation for a type of magician recognizable throughout central and northern Asia, the Arctic, the Americas, Indonesia, Australia, and Oceania. His characteristic feature is his ability to work himself into a state in which his spirit leaves his body and undertakes journeys and adventures beyond the reach of ordinary humans«³⁹. Without opening a discussion of how close the Siberian shaman is to the Australian or American magicians⁴⁰, I would ask: how does it at all concern Greek religion as a whole and Orphism in particular? Neither West, nor those to whom he refers, have offered any convincing proof of the actual penetration of shamanism into Greece through her northern neighbours – Scythians and Thracians⁴¹. The point in question is only a rather superficial similarity between some features of Greek religion and Siberian shamanism. But such a similarity one can find between most distant types of religions. Is it reasonable to speak of Orpheus' »shamanism« only

³⁸ Cf.: L. J. ALDERINK. *Creation and Salvation in Ancient Orphism*, Ann Arbor 1981, 18 ff.

³⁹ WEST, *Orphic Poems*, 5.

⁴⁰ M. HERMANN in his capital study supports with strong arguments his conclusion, that there is no ground to speak of shamanism out of the border of central and northern Asia (Schamanen – Pseudoschamanen, Erlöser und Heilbringer, Wiesbaden, 1970, Bd. I, 200, 705; Bd. II, 14 ff.). See also the works, mentioned in: J. BREMMER, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul*, Princeton 1983, 48 n. 95.

⁴¹ The idea of »Greek shamanism« almost at the same time was offered by the Russian scholar EVGENIJ KAGAROV (*Shamanstvo i pojavlenie ekstaza v grecheskoi i rimskoi religii*, *Izvestija Akademii Nauk SSSR*, N 5 (1934) 387–401) and K. MEULI (*Scythica*, *Hermes* 70, 1935). Then this idea was supported by E. DODDS (*The Greek and the Irrational*, Berkeley 1955, 140 ff.) and by W. BURKERT (*Pythagoreanism*, 162 ff.), who enlisted as shamans Pythagoras and Empedocles, and by some other scholars. But now not the genetical kinship of some elements with historical shamanism was emphasized, but their typological similarity. So Pythagoras and Empedocles are »shamans« not due to real contact with Siberian cults (even through intermediaries), but because some stories about them remind us (most often rather distantly) of real shamanistic practice. As for Scythians, we lack evidence not only about their shamanism (cf.: RENATE ROLLE, *Totenkult der Skythen*, Berlin/New York 1979), but even about whether they had ecstatic cults – *pace* all MEULI's efforts to prove the opposite. Moreover, the story about king Scyles (*Hdt.* IV, 79) shows, that Scythians didn't at all like Bacchic ecstasy in Greek rites (Σκύθαι δὲ τοῦ βακχεύειν πέρι Ἕλλησι δνειδίζουσι).

because he went down to Hades? Then Odysseus and Heracles also were shamans! Even though an ecstatic cult really was a characteristic feature of Orphism, such cults are spread all over the world, and there is no ground to connect it with shamanism, – if we are not going to follow the theory of »panshamanism«, developed by M. ELIADE in a number of his works⁴². But however we regard this theory, it is obvious that between mythology and religious doctrines of Orphic communities in different parts of Greece, their cults and way of life there is much more internal unity, than between all this – and Siberian shamanism⁴³.

But let us return to the arguments of LINFORTH, one of the most serious critics of »Orphic religion«. Though he didn't deny a certain connection between different aspects of Orphism⁴⁴, he tried to prove, that there was less unity here, than supposed by even such moderate historians of this movement, as GUTHRIE and NILSSON. Noting that no concrete person in antiquity was called an Orphic, LINFORTH then put the question: if anybody has been called so, what should we know of such a person without additional information? Anyway we couldn't say what rites he used, what manner of life he led, what theological doctrines he believed in⁴⁵.

So the problem is, whether we have a right to draw on the base of extremely heterogeneous evidence some 'average' figure of an Orphic, for whom all the features ascribed to Orphism, or at least the principal ones, are proper?

How difficult the problem put by LINFORTH is can be demonstrated by a parallel with another movement of that time – Pythagoreanism. Its character is usually considered to be more definite and distinct, we know much of people called Pythagoreans, their views and activity. There is a list of 218 Pythagoreans, most probably written by Aristoxenus of Tarent, who followed the direct Pythagorean tradition⁴⁶. Nevertheless, it is far from easy to find something in common among those who considered themselves to be followers of Pythagoras.

It is known that Pythagoras propagated metempsychosis, but there is no evidence that all or at least most Pythagoreans believed in it (among them, for instance, was Hippo, whom already Theophrastus called ἄθεος). An important role in the philosophy of some Pythagoreans played number-doctrine, several Pythagoreans were mathematicians. But the others never followed number philosophy and studied not mathematics, but medicine, while the majority never expressed any

⁴² M. ELIADE, *Shamanism, Archaic Technique of Ecstasy*, New York 1964. Convincing criticism of »Greek shamanism« see: BREMMER, *Op. cit.* 25–48. Cf. also: M. A. LEVI, *I nomadi alla frontiera. I popoli delle steppe e l'antico mondo greco-romano*, Roma 1989, 111 n. 117, 112, 116–117.

⁴³ In his recent article on Orpheus Fr. GRAF mentions shamanism rather out of habit, each time noting, that actually those references do not explain anything (*Orpheus: A Poet among Men, Interpretations of Greek Mythology*, ed. J. BREMMER, London 1987, 80–106).

⁴⁴ LINFORTH, *Op. cit.* 291–292.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 289.

⁴⁶ BURKERT, *Pythagoreanism*, 105 n. 40.

interest in science and philosophy. Some of Pythagoreans strictly abstained from meat, others not only never followed this prohibition, but even denied that it went back to Pythagoras. Some Pythagoreans actively took part in a political life, but we know nothing of the participation of the others. Wandering poor philosophers and their contemporary the brilliant mathematician and successful political leader Archytas of Tarent – they are all called Pythagoreans in our sources.

So, while the school in general can be adequately described with a number of features, to every particular Pythagorean only one or several of these features is characteristic, or such a combination of them that does not fit others. In fact we cannot name any feature, which was proper to all Pythagoreans without any exception, at least in the first two centuries of the school's existence, to say nothing of the authors of Hellenistic Pseudopythagorica or Neopythagorean *θεουργοί* and prophets like Apollonius of Tyana. Rejecting the »definitional essentialism«⁴⁷, we could say, that a Pythagorean in antiquity was called anybody connected at least with something in those doctrines, occupations and rules of behaviour, which were associated with the name of Pythagoras, while the understanding of all this was changing from one generation to another. Is this far from the conclusion that there were no Pythagoreans and consequently, no Pythagoreanism, and existed only separate groups of people, united just with the common authority – Pythagoras?

Considering all the circumstances (not the least is lack of evidence) one should acknowledge such a conclusion hasty and not justified, as well as the analogous conclusion of WEST concerning Orphism⁴⁸. If we are not always able to define exactly the community of traits and degree of doctrinal proximity in Orphism, it does not mean, that these tendencies didn't exist at all. There is no necessity to suppose that each participant of this movement should be described with that very number of features, as the movement in general. As in the case with Pythagoreans we may expect rather essential individual and group differences, all the more because religious beliefs are much more variable and less definite than, i.e. philosophic and scientific doctrines⁴⁹.

Although in Orphism from the very beginning there existed literature of mythological and theological contents, this had not lead to a great proximity of doctrines in various Orphic communities. Orphic poems, as NILSSON indicated, are not to be fully identified with holy books in other religions⁵⁰. *Buchreligion* is supposed to keep its holy texts unchangeable, whereas with Orphic poems quite the opposite happened: everyone interested in them could not only freely interpret their contents, but also change the text according to his mind.

⁴⁷ Cf.: ALDERINK, Op. cit., 19.

⁴⁸ WEST, Op. cit., 3.

⁴⁹ ALDERINK, Op. cit., 20–23.

⁵⁰ NILSSON, Op. cit., 183.

In spite of all these limitations, it would be quite justified to suppose a closeness of views in different groups of Orphics, and the Olbian grafitti confirm that. The point in question is metempsychosis, which some scholars consider to be the principal doctrine in Orphism, while the others deny its very presence in it⁵¹. On the first grafitto, as we already noted, the following words are engraved in a row: βίος θάνατος βίος, and lower -ἀλήθεια. WEST in his article noted reasonably that these words imply the faith in a life after death⁵². It is unlikely that these words imply just a enduring existence in Hades, most probably they suppose the existence of a cycle, where temporary death is replaced with a new birth.

In the most recent time Orphic metempsychosis has received one more, maybe the most convincing confirmation. On recto of Olbian grafitto N 3, before the word ψυχή JURIJ VINOGRADOV has managed to read the word σῶμα⁵³. So, we have a known opposition of body and soul, about which Plato tells in that very passage (Crat. 400 c), where Orphic metempsychosis is mentioned. And if some sceptic even after the finding of the classic pair σῶμα – ψυχή (perfectly completing the text of the first plate βίος – θάνατος – βίος) is going to doubt Orphic metempsychosis, it means that he hopes to find an Orphic text with the words: »We Orphics believe in transmigration of souls«!

It should be noted in conclusion, that Orphic grafitti, taken together and examined on the background of other evidence, tell us what was to be expected. They seriously strengthen the position of those who continued to defend, in spite of all objections (and among them there were very serious ones) the historical reality of Orphism as a religious movement, and not as a conglomerate of phenomena, not connected with each other⁵⁴. Finally, this valuable find demonstrates once more, how limited with poor and fragmentary material our knowledge is, if even a small plate with several scrawled words is able to clarify the situation in a field, studied already more than 150 years⁵⁵.

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⁵¹ Cf.: BURKERT, *Pythagoreanism*, 126 n. 32, 128 n. 49.

⁵² WEST, *Orphics in Olbia*, 18.

⁵³ JU. VINOGRADOV, *Zur sachlichen und geschichtlichen Deutung der Orphiker-Plättchen von Olbia, Orphée et Orphisme*, Genève 1990 (in press).

⁵⁴ Is it really important, that in antiquity there was no such term as »Orphism«? It should be remembered, that ancient authors also never used such terms as »Platonism«, »Stoicism« or »Gnosticism«, although nobody today doubt the existence of *Platonikoi*, *Stoikoi*, and *Gnostikoi*.

⁵⁵ My thanks are due to PETER McLAUGHLIN for correcting the English of this paper.