To ask for such details and refinements is perhaps to ask for a different book. The books at hand are an excellent concise presentation by a master Euripidean, and they will certainly be of great value to a variety of readers.

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This is the first systematic extensive study of the Derveni papyrus, found in 1962 and dated between 340 and 320 B.C. Therefore, it is the first papyrus found in mainland Greece and it might be the oldest Greek papyrus found so far. This was a very significant find, which threw new light on our knowledge of the classical period, providing long fragments of what seems to be the oldest Orphic poem, a sample of early literary exegesis, a philosophical commentary along the lines of the last Presocratics and the description and interpretation of badly known religious rituals. It is not surprising that a vast bibliography arose about it, although a critical edition based on the original text has not been published yet.

In fact a copy of the original text without critical apparatus was published in 1982. The text was based on an early version with some supplements by Tsantsanoglou and Parássoglou, but also with additions from different sources, and mistakes. It was therefore discredited by those who were in charge of its edition. In 1997 Tsantsanoglou published the first seven columns without critical apparatus and Laks and Most presented a careful translation into English based on a text, also corrected by Tsantsanoglou. In 2002 Janko published an ‘interim text’ and later on the papyrus was still published twice. Betegh (B.) presents in pp. 4–55 the text and translation of the papyrus. Although this text according to him «makes no claim to be a critical edition», it is meticulous and includes a brief but complete critical apparatus. The translation is very accurate.

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1 Such is the dating by K. Tsantsanoglou — G. M. Parássoglou, Heraclitus in the Derveni Papyrus, in: Aristoxenica, Menandreia, Fragmenta Philosophica, Firenze 1988, 125–133. It was dated between 325–275 by E. G. Turner, Greek manuscripts of the ancient world, Oxford 1971. Jourdan (see n. 8) XIII–XIV and Betegh himself 61 doubt this dating.


5 K. Tsantsanoglou in: Laks-Most, quoted in n. 2, 93–128, with a long commentary.

6 Ibid. 9–22.

7 R. Janko, The Derveni papyrus: an Interim Text, ZPE 141, 1–62, which reached B. when he was already about to submit his manuscript for publication. The other two works we will quote here could not be taken into consideration by B.

First, B. (56–73) provides archaeological data about the papyrus’ find and dating suggested by Themelis and Touratsoglou. He also deals with the scripture and reconstruction of the columns, he presents the editorial situation of the text (which still awaits publication by Tsantsanoglou), and he reviews the attempts to identify the author. He also considers the function of the papyrus and whether the author was an orphic believer. Throughout this chapter B. shows caution, he puts forward the problems and he defers its solution till the study of the content of the text.

After that B. studies the first columns (74–91) in which the Derveni author (DA) describes a ritual, probably a funerary one, attacks certain religious practices and people’s ignorance and he concludes with the analysis of certain rituals performed by magi. B. considers, and I believe he is right, that «the most probable scenario ... is that the ritual activities dealt with in column 2 and 6 constitute the immediate topic ... and the rest is invoked in order to explain these cult activities» (75).

A problem (77) is the reference to ὀρνίθητον in coll. II 7 and VI 11, since the Orphics did not sacrifice living creatures. B. suggests translating ’birdlike’ and he thinks that it can allude to the Erinyes. About this I have offered an alternative point of view. Another controversial question is the identity of the magi of col. VII. He comes to the conclusion, and I agree with him, that they are neither Persian magi nor quacks, but «leaders of the initiates, priests of a religious group», »a group that would include himself»4 (80) and he shows that the μόστατα have nothing to do with the Eleusinian cult (82–83). To the argumentation presented by B. I would add that, when DA refers in col. XX to the people that are initiated (δόσαι μὲν τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐστάλεξαν τοὺς τὴν τιμήτη τόθ), he uses words that, according to Rusten, Harvard 89, 1981, 139 «have Eleusinian overtones», but we should not see in it references to Eleusis. The expression τῇ πόλει cannot allude to Eleusis but, however, it can refer to the activity of the people alluded to by Plato R.364e πείθοντες οὐ μόνον ἰδιότες ἄλλα καὶ πόλεις ἄλλα.3

B. deals then with the interpretation of the ritual by the DA (83–85) and with the presence of souls, daimones, Erinyes and Eumenides (85–89), assuming that ἡμικράτων mentioned in line 5 are souls of the dead, although not necessarily coincident with the Erinyes; furthermore he suggests that the δαίμονες are also souls. The ritual framework may be initiation or funerary rites because they are closely connected. B. rightly concludes that the first columns indicate that »understanding and interpretation are the key concepts in the author’s religious attitude« (91).

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1 P. G. Themelis and I. P. Touratsoglou, Ο θάφτων του Δερβηνίου, Athens 1997, 221 maintain that »all the evidence favours a date for the burials in the late fourth to early third century«.
2 In the Appendix: Diogoras and the Derveni author (pp. 373–382) B. is not convinced of Janko’s proposal of considering Diogoras of Melos is the author.
4 In p. 82 B. should have quoted the passage (1.10, p. 60 Grensemann) of the Hippocratic treatise On the Sacred Disease. There is another relevant passage in the same work (18, 6, p. 92 Grensemann ἁνεν καθαριόν καὶ μεγίτος καὶ πλῆς τῆς τομής βενανθροί). 5 Cf. A. Bernabé in: G. Sfameni Gasparro (ed.), Destino e salvezza, Cosenza 1998, 56.
Later on B. tackles the reconstruction of the poem commented by the author of the text (92–131). Using excellent philological procedures, he analyses the lemmata, their order and their origin. It seems that the commentator – except in the cases in which he explicitly quotes another author, like Heracлитus – refers always to Orpheus.

As for the two quotations (similar but not identical to Od. 8.335, II. 24.527–528 in col. XXVI 4 and 6–7), B. points out, against those who regard them as quotations from Homer, that these passages are introduced in the same way as the ones by Orpheus, and concludes that DA «thinks that the author of these verses is Orpheus too, even if these lines are not necessarily from the poem commented upon» (130). DA intends to demonstrate that Orpheus uses ἵκες in the sense of ‘good’ and it seems natural that he resorts to other examples of the poetry of Orpheus himself and not to other poets.

After examining (105) the order in which DA quotes his verses in connection with the poem structure, B carries out a careful reconstruction of the hieros logos.

After studying (pp. 112–122) the vexata quaestio of interpreting οἶδον as ‘phallus’ or as an epithet of Phanes, B. concludes (123) that «both views have powerful arguments on their side, but neither of them can settle the question definitively», although he finds the first one more convincing. There is, in my opinion, an important argument in favour of it. Not only Phanes is never mentioned in the papyrus, but he neither has place in the generations of gods described in the poem. In the ‘Rhapsodies’ Phanes is Sky’s father. But in the Derveni theogony, Sky is called Εὐφρονίδης ‘Night’s son’. The only reason why a matronym may hold the place of the usual patronym in an old epic text is that Night, the primeval goddess, do not have a partner, but he generated Sky, like in Hes. Th. 127, without the intervention of a male god. That leaves Phanes out of the poems’ plot.

After that (132–181) B. tries to contrast «our own ‘deeper’ interpretation of the poem» (133) with the one of DA. He discusses whether it is a theogony, a hymn or a hieros logos (136–138), and he leaves the question open (I think that ἱερὸς λόγος in col. VII 7 claims strongly for a hieros logos). B. reconstructs the plot of the poem, with the help of other orphic theogonic poems (138–166) and then he comments on its characteristics (166–181).

I do not share B.’s reasons to doubt (154–156) Burkert’s interpretation, according to which Aither is an ejaculation of Sky. This sense of the verb ἀφοίησαι is supported both by DA (col. XIV 1–2) and by Aphrodite’s birth as a result of Zeus’ ejaculation (ἡμην) in col. XXI 1, which echoes this first ‘birth’ of Aither; πρὸς τὸς predicative (and consequently functionally equivalent to an adverb) alludes, with the same ‘narrative speed’ characteristic of this theogony, to the episode of Aither’s ejaculation and to Sky’s primeval generating capacity, previous to his castration. The alternative, that is, translating the accusative ἀφθηγή ‘source of the movement’ is more clumsy. And it will lead us to the problem of where would Aither’s birth he dealt with in the poem. But B. settles the question in the following pages and he contends that «the genealogy starts with the Night–Aither pair» (275). If we accept Burkert’s interpretation, then the poet would have placed Aither at the very beginning, like in other theogonies, but not in the line of succession Night–Sky–Kronos–Zeus. In the German edition Burkert adds also Egyptian parallels to this mythical theme.

1 I think that B. is right. I have therefore included these fragments in my edition of ‘Orphica’ with the numbers 687 and 688.
2 W. Burkert, Die Homer i magi, Venezia 1999, 82.
3 Cf. Of 8 Bernabé οἶδον οἰκτίπτων, ὡς ἄφθηγη ἔριδος προῦτος.
B.’s reconstruction of the «first theogony» (cf. the schema on p. 166) is to a great extent developed on the basis of the second creation and he takes for granted that all the gods created in the new creation had been already born in the first one, which is not demonstrated. It seems clear that in the commented hieros logos what was most thoroughly told was Zeus’ new creation, and that it is not possible to go much far in the reconstruction of the first one, alluded to only in a few verses (1 5-6-L. 7-9 Beetheh, OF 10-11 Bernabé).

Later on, B. points out two interesting problems about the rational speculation that underlies the poem: ἡρμηνεία (beginning and power pp. 172-174) and One-Many (175-179), and finally he deals with the «creationist model of cosmogony» (179-181).

B. turns to DA’s views (182-223), which becomes more difficult because he «does not explain his theory in a linear way, but distributes the elements of it in his exegetical remarks» (182). In contrast to other scholars, which have preferred to show scattered similarities with different authors or resort to the issue of eclecticism. B. tackles the task of reconstructing from disiecta membra the DA’s basic ideas. He points out that he «identifies several different deities ... with each other ... and with some more abstract concepts, both physical and psychological» (184), in such a way that he starts by reviewing such identifications. What is innovative is that the DA comes to a very radical conclusion: «the plurality of divine names used by Orpheus ... is reduced to unity» (203), although «they reveal different aspects, functions or activities of the being named» (204). B. points out the similarity of this methodology with Stoic views (205) and he rightly concludes that «the Derveni author’s primary concerns in his commentary is to fuse the gods and goddesses of the poem so as to come up with a single cosmic god» (219). He also mentions that there are in the poem itself some aspects that support this interpretation «I would maintain that the Derveni author’s interpretation abuses the poem ... far less than is usually held to be the case» (221).

B. describes then (224-77) the way in which the cosmic gods and «the things that are» interact. A creation model on the basis of already existent materials. B. points out the difference between the expressions τὰ ὑπάρχοντα «the ingredients which are stable throughout the changes», τὰ ὀντα «the imperishable components» (which always subsisted ὑπάρχοντα) and τὰ νῦν ὀντα «the currently existing composite entities», which according to B. are inserted in «a well-established tradition of Greek cosmogonical speculation, ranging from Anaximander through Anaxagoras to Plato’s Timaeus» (227). B. thoroughly examines each of the constituents of the cosmology in a systematic and convincing way.

There is only one point on which I disagree with B. On pp. 235-243 the problem of the position of the sun is suggested in quite complicated terms, from a passage in col. XV 3-4, γογγος[ωμον γογ τοι της ήμισι και ύγιομομονουν / ἤμ μεν ν, I do not think that [ε]πεancements τουυλουμοτυμων τε [ματ θ]κουμε[θον / χαραμεν ην άντι χοντοτο (col. XIV 2-3) alludes to castration (B. p. 234), but to Aither’s origin. The passage appears after the reference to Aither’s origin (dealt with in col. XIII), while the one in col. XV 3-4 figures after the glosses to the expression «he did something terrible», that clearly alludes to Sky’s castration of col. XIV. Consequently I think that DA transfers to physical terms the myth of Sky’s castration. The phallus (τιθος), identified by DA with the sun (ημισι), is sepa-
The author tries now to examine the place of DA’s set of tenets in the context of Presocratic philosophy. That is the reason why he devotes several chapters to the philosophers whose ideas seem to be reflected in DA’s ideology. He considers (278) that the similarities with the Atomists are superficial, but he deals with Anaxagoras (278–325), whose influence over DA can be seen in his resort to the Noûς, although B. rightly points out: «I would … resist the attribution (p. 305) of a highly complex theory of matter to the [Derveni] author». B. deals also with Diogenes of Apollonia and Archelaus of Athens (306–324). According to B., DA and Diogenes share the idea of the intelligence and divinity of air, but there are many differences in other points, «especially in the cosmic role of the intelligent principle and in the details of the respective cosmological theories» (307). The reference to Heraclitus (325–348) is necessary, because he is the only author, apart from Orpheus, mentioned by name in the surviving text of the papyrus. In contrast to the previous studies, focused on what the papyrus adds to our knowledge of Heraclitus, B. attempts to «examine Heraclitus’ contribution to our knowledge of the Derveni author» (326). After analysing the quotation of B 3 + B 94 D.-K. he tries to understand through Heraclitus the combination of physical and scatological ideas put forward by DA. In order to do that, B. resorts as well to the comparison with a difficult text, an Orphic gold leaf, Tablet C,² to reconstruct ideas about the role of fire (especially of the thunderbolt) and the divine justice. This is the most speculative chapter in the book, but it opens very interesting perspectives.

Finally, B. draws some conclusions (149–372), which I entirely share, about the main purpose of the text (stating that «the subject matter is a specific ritual») and about its author: «he was a priestly figure with Orphic allegiance» … «In both parts of the text he provides explanation and interpretation» (352). «In order to gain the trust of the public his text is directed to, he claims that he is the one who possesses genuine expertise» (353). He also examines the way to develop such principles, and he finishes with a comparison between DA and Empedocles. The book closes with a comprehensive bibliography and indexes.

The author offers us a thorough and very useful work.³ Both its philological and philosophical bases are solid and he has used an extensive bibliography, even

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1 It does not fall into the sea like in Hes. Th. 189. Because of that the poet, when he must refer to Aphrodite’s birth, cannot use the Hesiodic myth, but he tells that the goddess is born of Zeus’ ejaculation (col. XXI 1).

2 In the form in which it was printed by A. Bernabé and A. I. Jiménez San Cristóbal, Instrucciones para el Más Allá. Las laminillas órficas de oro, Madrid 2001, 187–188. B. shows interesting parallels with Heraclitus in the gold leaf like line 2 2 Ἡμι, πῦρ δὴ πῶς τοι [. . .].νυκτὶ, and line 4 ἀντιμοβῆ.

the one that is not usually accessible to English speaking scholars. It is an essential and irreplaceable tool for the analysis of this complex text and of the issues related to it (the passage from Presocratic philosophy to the later one, the evolution of Orphism from religion to philosophy, the emergence of commentary of texts, the allegorical method and the points of contact between DA’s allegorical analysis and the Orphic poem itself, which he comments on), which is particularly interesting, since they coincide with issues that are indispensable in order to understand the Greek ideological development – so badly known – which closes classicism and opens the Hellenistic period.

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