
Lida Fabian Miraj

**ORPHEUS THE EVOLUTION OF THE MYTH IN GREEK,
ROMAN, EARLY CHRISTIAN PERIOD AND ORPHEUS
MOSAIC OF DYRRACHIUM**

*Over his head
Birds without number are flying. Fishes leap around
Out of the deep blue waters, won by the tuneful sound.
Simon., fr. 27 Diehl II (J. Sterling)*

By the end of fourth century and the division of Roman Empire, Dyrrachium had already a confirmed town-planning,¹ when the city as the *Colonia Julia Augusta Dyrrachinorum*,² was a main center of a province, the western end or the head bridge of the *Via Egnatia*, (Fig. 1) part of a large region, often named *Dysrrahia*³ always within the limits of the Macedoine Province. Studying the town-planning of Roman period is noted the rigorous north-south and east-west orientation of walls and streets that obliged us to have a clear vision that town-planning was based on the orthogonal system, which had perhaps the earlier origin, and is influenced by the geographical position, which to a certain extent, is preserved even today.⁴

During the first four centuries AD, the center of the city was composed with grandiose public buildings as the Amphitheater (Fig. 2) and Roman Public Baths (Fig. 3) constructed over the line of existing roads passed on the foot of the highest hill at one side, having the sea at the other side. (Fig. 4) This road, connected two harbors, situated one in south, where it continued to be during the centuries and, one in north, named *Porta* or *Porta Romana*. Up on this hill,

¹ In the vast majority of cases a Byzantine city was merely the continuation of a Roman city, which, in turn, may have been founded in the Hellenistic period or even earlier. See C. Mango, *Architettura bizantina, Electa*, Milano 1978, 20.

² F. Miraj & H. Myrto, Ujësjetësi i Dyrrahut, *Iliria*, 1982/1, 131-156.

³ S. Byzantini, De urbibus et populis, *Iliret dhe Iliria*, Tiranë 1965, 41.

⁴ L. Miraj, Dyrrah in the first centuries AD. A general view in urbanistic and architecture, *Acts of XIV Congreso Internacional de Arqueologia Classica*, Tarragona 1994, 285-287.



Fig. 1 The map of Via Egnatia

Сл. 1 карта Виа Егнатиа

probably was the acropolis of Epidamnos since the very ancient times.⁵ Going to the north and North West, from the slopes of the hills to the wet land, it was developed the entire city.⁶ (Fig. 5)

Often, during the excavations for the new construction of the city, are discovered fragments of these villas decorated with frescos, mosaics, etc. The road system of the Roman colony is not known, though the alignments of imperial and late-antique buildings suggest that the lower city had an orthogonal street pattern running north-south and east-west.⁷ It is not known whether this road layout preserved a more archaic system. Little else of the early colony has been identified. The aqueduct, (Fig. 6) ascribed a Hadrianian date on the basis of inscriptions on the fistulae,⁸ (Fig. 7) entered the city from across the swamp, in the north-east part of the city. This physiognomy of the city remained the same until our days, and it is documented archaeologically since fourth and third centuries BC.⁹ It was not

⁵ Pausania, VI, 10, 8.

⁶ L. Miraj, *op .cit.*, 285-287.

⁷ *Ibidem*

⁸ F. Miraj, Mbishkrimet për ujësjellësin e Durrësit, *Monumentet*, Tiranë 1981/2, 127-129.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

Fig. 2 The Amphitheater of Durres
Сл. 2 Амфитеатар у Драчу



possible yet to excavate a full villa, because of long survive of the city at the same place for centuries, but discovered fragments create the image of the architectural design and decorations.

One of the interesting mosaics, part of a villa, excavated years ago, is composed with the figure of Orpheus which is surrounded by both animals and vegetations. Around this principle 'icon' the mosaic is composed by geometrical and floral motives.¹⁰ (Fig. 8, Fig. 9)

The theme of this mosaic is one of the most usual: the central figure of Orpheus, the greatest of all musicians, surrounded by the animals of the *paradeisos*.¹¹ The range of animals charmed by Orpheus is considerable,

¹⁰ M. Zeqo, Rezultate të Gërmimeve Arkeologjike, *Iliria* 1989/2, Tiranë 1989, 285.

¹¹ Orpheus is an important figure from Greek mythology, the inspiration for subsequent Orphic cults, much of the literature, poetry and drama of ancient Greece and Rome and, due to his association with singing and the lyre, much dramatic Western classical music. The historicity of Orpheus was generally accepted by the ancients, though Aristotle believed that he never actually existed. According to the legend he sang a wide variety of songs. Sometimes he sang high-pitched songs about the mystical creation of the universe. Other times he played low notes on his lyre as he sang of the battles of Zeus and the Olympians gods who clashed against the Titans. Orpheus even had songs about people who were changed into flowers or birds. But whatever he sang, the rich clear words and the silvery notes from his harp were so enchanting that they always had a magical effect on everything around him. His songs could charm even rocks and rivers as well as humans and animals. Once when Orpheus was playing his splendid music in the forest, the oak trees pulled up their roots. They followed him down the mountainside and planted themselves by the seashore where Orpheus ended his song.

The name Orpheus does not occur in Homer or Hesiod. According to Marcel Detienne (M. Detienne, *The Writing of Orpheus. Greek Myth in Cultural Context* (Translated by Janet Hoyd from French *L'Écriture d'Orphée*, Paris 1989), The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland 2003, 313) the word *myth*, in itself, is in no way deceptive. Myth is a *natural and regular product of the human mind reacting to particular circumstances*, and in such circumstances Taylor (Th. Taylor, *The Mystical Initiations or Hymns of Orpheus*, London 1787.) declares, the human mind is bound to mythologise. See G. S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, 197, 259-260.

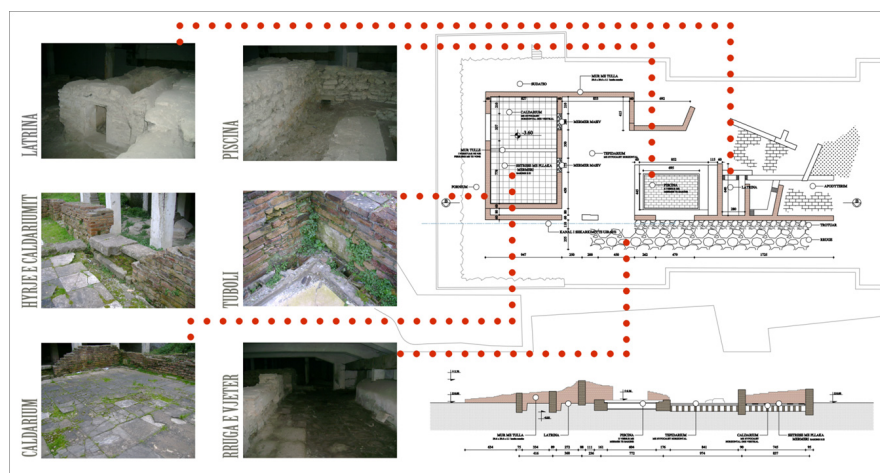


Fig. 3 The Roman Public Bath of Durres (3 pictures)

Сл. 3 Римско јавно купатило у Драчу (3 слике)



Fig. 5 The schematic Plan of Durres City

Сл. 5 Шематски план града Драча

and while some may well have been local species, others doubtless came out of pattern books. It represents only one episode from the legend: Orpheus charming animals with his music and with the power of his music to attract the animals, trees, and rocks. This scene enjoyed widespread popularity throughout the Empire.¹²

¹² The earliest surviving reference is a two-word fragment of the sixth-century BC lyric poet Ibycus (c. 530 BC): *onomaklyton Orphēn* („Orpheus famous of name“). Orpheus was called by Pindar (522—442 BC) „the father of songs“ and asserted to be a son of the Thracian king *Oeagrus*. The Muse Calliope was his mother, but as Karl Kerényi observes, „in the popular mind he was more closely linked to the community of his disciples and adherents than with any particular race or family“. Aristophanes, Euripides, Plato, and Pindar, make up the bulk of classical writing the Orphic mysteries. There are also references to Orphism from later pagan writers, Strabo, Pausanias, and Plutarch. Orphism was in active competition with Christianity during much of the time of the Roman Empire.

Orpheus was the son of Calliope and either *Oeagrus* or Apollo. He was the greatest musician and poet of Greek myth, whose songs could charm wild beasts and coax even rocks and trees into movement. He was one of the Argonauts, and when the Argo had to pass the island of the Sirens, it was Orpheus' music which prevented the crew from being lured

In fact Orpheus is a puzzling figure, although peaceable-poet and mystic and interpreted as the Indo-European myth. His myth seems to be a patchwork of separate elements: the story of how he brought his wife back from the underworld; the power of his music to attract animals, trees, and rocks; his death at the hands of maenads or of the Thracian women; the vicissitudes of his severed head.¹³ As part of eastern Orpheus mosaics of the third to fourth centuries, the Orpheus mosaic of Durrës illustrates a development in the presentation of the singer and his audience departing from the naturalistic figure style inherited from Greek art.

The myth of Orpheus, served as a storehouse of mythological data, the hymns and Orphic poetry contains a wide range of mythological thinking which was recited in mystery-rites and purification rituals. There is little know about the original Thracian „Orphic Mysteries“, rituals but through history Orpheus is a god of love and death whose adherents valued esoteric knowledge and an ascetic life as a path for their soul to achieve a higher level in the next life. Orpheus, although known as a priest of both Apollo

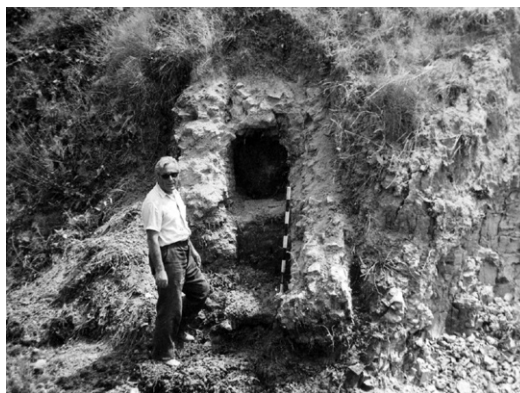


Fig. 6 The Acqueduct

Сл. 6 Аквадукт



Fig. 7 Inscription on the fistulae of the acqueduct

Сл. 7 Натпис на фистулама аквадукта

to destruction. When Orpheus' wife, Eurydice, was killed by the bite of a serpent, he went down to the underworld to bring her back. His songs were so beautiful that Hades finally agreed to allow Eurydice to return to the world of the living. However, Orpheus had to meet one condition: he must not look back as he was conducting her to the surface. Just before the pair reached the upper world, Orpheus looked back, and Eurydice slipped back into the netherworld once again.

See W. Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, London 1873. „Orpheus“; K. Kerényui, *The Heroes of the Greeks*, New York/London: Thames and Hudson 1959; K. Kerényui, *Die griechisch-orientalische Romanliteratur in religionsgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung*, Berlin 1927; H. Stern, 'La Mosaïque d'Orphée de Blanzv-lès-Fismes', *Gallia* 13, 1955, 41-77; S. E. Waywell, 'Roman Mosaics in Greece', *American Journal of Archaeology* 83, 1979, 318; J. Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*, Cleveland Meridian Publishing Co., 1962, 13-18.

¹³ F. Graf, 'Orpheus: A Poet among men', *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* ed. by Jan N. Bremmer, Kent 1987, 80-107 and J. F. Nagy, *Hierarchy, Heroes, and Heads: Indo-European Structures in Greek Myth*, *Approaches to Greek Myth*, Edited and Introduced by L. Edmunds, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland 1990, 201-238.



Fig. 8 The Orpheus, in the Orpheus mosaic of Durres

Сл. 8 Орфеј у Орфејовом мозаику у Драчу



Fig. 9 Detail around the main emblem of the Orpheus mosaic (2 pictures)

Сл. 9 Детаљ око главног грба Орфејовог мозаика (2 слике)

and Dionysus, was not particularly popular with the Greeks, whose preference for the Dionysian carnivals of rebirth and wine to the stories of afterlife and remonstrations against sin is aptly demonstrated by the abundance of art stilling surviving more than a great age later.

The cult of Dionysus was more simple, primitive, elemental, spontaneous, and emotional. That of Orpheus was more elaborate, developed, controlled, and intellectualistic. Still, when all is said, the two systems had much in common. Both centered in the same god, Dionysus. Both aimed at the same goal, immortality through divinity. Both sought to attain that goal by prescribed rites and ceremonies. Both made a strictly individualistic appeal and were highly developed along the lines of personal experience. But Orphism fostered an ascetic rule of life that was the exact opposite of Dionysian license, and developed an elaborate theology of a highly speculative character. In brief, Orphism represented a reformed Dionysianism.

According to a Late Antique summary of Aeschylus's lost play *Bassarides*, Orpheus at the end of his life disdained the worship of all gods save the sun, whom he called Apollo. One early morning he ascended Mount Pangaion (where Dionysus had an oracle) to salute his god at dawn, but was torn to death by Thracian Maenads for not honoring his previous patron, Dionysus. Here his death is analogous with the death of Dionysus, to whom therefore he functioned as both priest and avatar.

The Orphic first, and the Pythagorean later, believed in the transmigration of souls from body to body. On leaving the corpse at death, the soul was normally doomed to inhabit the bodies of other men or of animals even, passing on through a chain of physical existences until finally purified. An Orphic fragment preserved by Proclus reads:

„Therefore the soul of man changing in the cycles of time enters into various creatures; now it enters a horse, again it becomes a sheep . . . or as one of the tribe of chill serpents creeps on the sacred ground.“ Reincarnation, like dualism, was an important item in Orphic theology.

In general the legends and heroic deeds of Greek and Roman mythology had little to offer



Fig. 10 Good Shepherd in the Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome

Сл. 10 Добри Пастир у катакомбама Присиле, Рим



Fig. 11 Attic red figured Vase with Orpheus. Pergamon Altes Museum, Berlin

Сл. 11 Ваза цврених фигура на црној подлози за Орфејом. Пергамон Алтес Музеум, Берлин

the Christians. In fact many must have filled them with horror especially at a time when superstition and mystical orgies were rife, while the tales themselves are far from presenting the gods or heroes as models of virtue. Moreover any illusion to gods and divine intervention reeked of idolatry, which was no more acceptable to the Christians than it was to the Jews. The Christian catacombs did not use much of the myriad of pagan statues they had, but they did adapt *Orpheus*, to represent Jesus as the Good Shepherd: "I am the Good Shepherd, I know my sheep and my sheep knows me." (*Gospel of John*, Ch. 10, ver. 14) (Fig. 10)

There was nothing for the Christians to envy in these myths-the fruits of cosmogonic speculation or historical transformations-since, contrary to the so-called natural religious of the pagans with their philosophical premises; Christianity was based on fact, the acts of Christ as related in the Gospels. And did not the latter, at that time, well before any dogmatic or catechetical instruction, constitute the greater



Fig. 12 Death of Orpheus. The Attic Red Figure Vase (Stamnos) from Nola in the Musée du Louvre, Department des Antiquités Grecques and Romaines, Paris (3 pictures)

Сл. 12 Смрт Орфеја. Ваза цврених фигура на црној подлози (Стамнос) из Нола у музеју Лувр, Одељење грчких и римских антиквитета, Париз (3 слике)



Fig. 13 Christian Painting and Sculpture before the Peace of the Church before AD 313. Rome, Catacomb of Domitilla. Orpheus-Christ with Animals

Сл. 13 Хришћанско сликарство и скулптура пред Мир у Цркви 313. пре нове ере . Рим, Катакомба Домитила. Орфеј-Христ са животињама

part of the Christian teaching?

This background, then, was dominated by the figure of Christ, and, at this stage of our enquiry, it may seem that the presentation of Christ must have posed a problem. Yet no echo of a controversy on this point has reached us nor is even detectable. Although it must evidently have appeared impossible to bestow on Christ the attributes of the supreme god of Olympus it seems that he quite naturally assumed those of a shepherd and, by extension, those of Orpheus.¹⁴

Even divested of the elements, which made it the nucleus of religions, the myth of Orpheus is of outstanding significance to its poet, and to poets. For in Orpheus the power of poetry reached its zenith; he is the father of song. (Aesch. *Ag.*, 1629; Pind. *Pyth.* IV, 176) Plato (*Rep.* 364e, *Crat.* 402b, and *Phileb.* 66c) speaks of a mass of books attributed to Orpheus and Musaios (usually referred to as a son or disciple of Orpheus), whose subject is purification and the after-life. He also quotes hexameters, mainly theogonical, as being “of Orpheus”. In Euripides (*Hipp.* 954), the follower of Orpheus and of the ascetic life is the respecter of “many writings”. Aristotle (*de an.* 410b28), though he did not believe in a historical Orpheus, knew of the theories of the soul contained in “the so called Orphic verses” Euripides, Aristophanes (*Frogs*, 1032, [Dem] in *Aristog.* 25, 11) and the author of the speech against Aristogeiton know Orpheus as the author of *teletai*, for the double definition of which we may perhaps follow the *Etymologicum Magnum*: “A sacrifice of a mystical character; but Chrysippos says that it is right to give the name *teletai* to accounts of divine matters”. Plato referred expressly to Orpheus or his followers, and find that they contain references to an ascetic way of life, to the assertion that the body is the prison or the tomb of the soul, salvation by initiation, bliss for the just and punishment for the unjust, and related ideas.¹⁵ Proclus (*Theolog. Plat.* I, 5, 25-26, 4) made an echo on the genealogy of Orpheus-Pitagora-Plato and consumed

¹⁴ P. de Borquet, *Early Christian Art*, New York 1971, 52.

¹⁵ See and W.K.C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement*, London 1952, 310-311.

the pass from the philosophy to the theology, introduced in the western culture.¹⁶ The legend of Orpheus puts beyond doubt the strange circumstance that he was a Hellenic living in Thrace, offering opposition to Dionysus in his own native land. His whole character, his calm and civilized air, his resemblance to, and championship of, the Hellenic Apollo and his position to the Thracian religion make it impossible that he should have been imagined as a barbarian. Yet he lives in Thrace. It is Pangaion that he climbs to worship Apollo. Vase paintings of the fifth century, which are among the earliest evidence for Orpheus show him playing his lyre to an audience of men, and although they are wearing obvious Thracian dress, Orpheus himself is clothed as a Greek. The cloaks and peaked caps of the Thracians serve to emphasize both the Greenness of the player and the foreignness of his surroundings.¹⁷ (Fig. 11)

Later writers admittedly speak freely of Orpheus as “the Thracian”, and so, once or twice, does Euripides. But it is fair to say that the earlier the evidence the more it lays stress on his being a Hellenic and a worshipper of Apollo; and since he was adopted, probably in the sixth century, by men who took



Fig. 14 Ivory with Orpheus in Bobbio Museum of the Abbey of St Columban

Сл. 14 Слоновача са Орфејом у Бобио музеју у опатији Св. Колумбана



Fig. 15 Orpheus in the catacombs of Saints Pietro and Marcellino in Rome

Сл. 15 Орфеј у катакомбама Св. Пиетро и Марчелино у Риму

¹⁶ See L. Brisson, *Orphée et l'Orphisme dans l'Antiquité gréco-romaine*, Aldershot Hampshire, Variorum 1995, 5.

¹⁷ The reference is particularly to the red-figured Attic vase in Berlin. See W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods*, London 1950, 315.



Fig. 16 Orpheus in the Byzantine Museum of Athens

Сл. 16 Орфеј у Византијском музеју у Атини



Fig. 18 Mosaic in the chapel of Galla Placidia, Ravenna

Сл. 18 Мозаик у капели Гала Плацидија у Равени

Dionysus for their god, though they modified his worship profoundly, this, coupled with the fact that, barbarian or Hellene, his home was in Thrace, was sufficient to make it natural for later tradition to refer to him simply as a Thracian.

The early tradition of Orpheus as a kind of Hellenic missionary in Thrace certainly singles him out from the common run of mythological figures. So does the alternative tradition about his death, that the women of Thrace murdered him on their own account, without the instigation of Dionysus, being moved by jealousy because he excluded them from his rites (another typically Hellenic trait!) and enticed their husbands away from

them.¹⁸ (Fig. 12¹⁹)

To Virgil, as to many a Greek writer, the myth of Orpheus is the myth of power of *carmen*, the symbol of the poet's incantatory power. Many poets had sought to obtain prestige for their work by using the name of a greater than themselves. The name of Orpheus, in particular, was often used, since he had both the dignity of remote antiquity and the cachet of a mystery-making magician.

Moreover, Orpheus enchants not only human beings but the rest of

¹⁸ *Idem*, 315-316.

¹⁹ Thracian women, with characteristic tattoos on their arms and dressed in chitons, run toward Orpheus with a variety of weapons. The left figure is armed with a rock and drapes her himation over her arm, the central one deals the death blow to Orpheus with a spear. The hero falls, holding his lyre up, his himation slipping off and wound bleeding (in added purple). The woman at right is about to hurl a large rock at him.

animal life. Even inanimate things, such as oaks (even stones), are brought under a measure of control. Such scenes were dramatized, Varro tells us, by rich Romans who produced Orphic enchantments, to lyre and trumpet, in their parks.²⁰

In Late Antiquity, certainly paganism is dominant on the figured mosaics with which the principal rooms of the most luxurious houses were often floored. But the use of pagan mythology for decorative purposes presents a problem. For it formed the common cultural background of pagan and Christian alike, and much of it was quite unexceptionable to Christians, being as innocent of truly pagan content as, for example, the classicizing art of Renaissance. The proof of this is the existence of monuments with a mixture of Christian and pagan motifs.²¹

The theme of the shepherd is traditional in the Bible, whose literature stems from a country of herdsmen. It is no less common in Greek and Roman iconography. This ambivalence has led some to suppose that its use by the Christians was an expression of their desire to avoid being disturbed in their religious practices by the pagans in a time of persecution or to avoid offending newcomers to their faith. The same fear is also supposed to have led them to insist, among mythological motifs of very shadowy religious significance, on those capable of suggesting a Christian or biblical meaning without being politically compromising. The fish and hence the dolphin stood for "Jesus Christ, Son of God Savior", an acrostic based on the Greek word *ichthus*; the dove and the olive branch recalled Noah's ark and all its peace symbolism, the anchor represented the soul's salvation; the orant reproduced the attitude of prayer; and even Cupid and Psyche suggested the union of the soul with God; but only the Christian initiates were familiar with all the many aspects of this symbolism. So much is certain but its use to support the assumption of a systematic search, inspired by fear, for ambivalent themes is at least debatable, if not purely and simply wrong. The supposed unwillingness of the Christians to portray Christ crucified, logically one of the first scenes they might have been expected to depict, is attributed to their fear of shocking new converts with the image of a tortured God. All this is part of that pseudo-history of the early days of Christianity that depicts the Christians as somehow standing apart from normal life. The symbolic intent behind the effective use of the above-mentioned motifs was not that of creating ambivalence, with all the attendant risks of ambiguity. It should not be forgotten that symbolism was typical of the entire epoch. Oriental influence and, more particularly the mystery religions, had planted it in every mind. The Christians, even these of pagan origin, did not escape. And it was quite natural that, along with Jewish Christians, they should have been led, merely by listening to the Gospels, to adopt the bucolic themes whose original religious import in pagan literature and iconography had always been rather superficial. Certainly, the Good Shepherd and doubtless, at

²⁰ M. Grant, *Myths of the Greeks and Romans*, Cleveland and New York 1962, 315.

²¹ D. Bowder, *The Age of Constantine and Julian*, London 1978, 157-158.

least among the Christians of Jewish origin, the biblical shepherd were present in their thoughts. Without betraying their significance, they could scarcely help linking them, without fear for and indeed as a sublimation of their faith with the shepherd figure of the pagan bucolic. The transition must have been a smooth one, since the earliest known representations reflect the Roman shepherd in style, pose and attributes. The later assimilation of the closely allied personage of Orpheus merely confirmed the accomplished fact.²²

The theme of Orpheus²³ charming the beasts had been adopted by the Christians as a parallel and symbol of Christ the Good Shepherd attracting and taming mankind, as early as the second century, as is known from and taming mankind, as early as the second century, as is known from writers and catacomb frescoes. So it is quite possible, indeed likely, that some of the mosaics with Orpheus, has Christian-inspired.²⁴

In fact the force of the Early Christian miracle images is their radical novelty. Over and over again they show Christ in the very moment his magical power takes effect. The most frequently represented good magicians were the semi-divine Orpheus and Apollonius of Tyana. It is significant that a fourth-century legend of what would have been the earliest image of Christ placed him in company with Orpheus and Apollonius. Images of Orpheus consistently show him singing his mystical message, charming the wild beasts into peace. Art was not called upon to demonstrate the magic of these famous magicians on behalf of mankind.²⁵ The Christ-Orpheus with animals is one of the images

²² P. de Borghet, *op. cit.* 52

²³ The myth of Orpheus, son of Egeus or Apollo and of the muse Calliope is considered founder of some mysteries connected with his name in religion of Antique Greece. In the Roman period poets as Virgil (*La Georgiche* book IV) and Ovidio (*Le Metamorfosi* X, 1-63) treated the result of the love of Orpheus for his wife, Eurydice. He was tragically separated from his wife, because she had been killed by the bite of a snake when she was running from Aristaeus, that pursued her along a river-bank. As all her comrades, and all the countryside of Thrace, lamented her fate, Orpheus had sung of her to his lyre upon the lonely shore. Then he had gone through the jaws of Taenarus down into the underworld to seek her out. His singing had held all Tartarus spell-bound, and Death's very home was shaken to hear that song; the Furies and three-mouthed Cerberus had been lulled, and Ixion's wheel had ceased to turn. Orpheus began to retrace his steps towards the upper world, followed by Eurydice. But forgetting that Proserpine had laid down the condition that he must not look behind him, he stopped, and looked back. In that moment all his labor was wasted. Already, death-cold, Eurydice was on Charon's boat, her passionate favorite and disliked be lover. Between his musical abilities singing with a lyre, Orpheus arrived to persecute the Gods of the Hell, Plutone and Proserpine and restituted Eurydice: they did that in the conditions that Orpheus will walk without the desire of arrived in the alive world, but remained in the world of the dead. Orpheus, the singer, the musician and the poet. His song '*struggente riusci a commuovere e ammonsire non solo tutti gli animali, incluso le fiere selvagge, ma anche la natura inanimata*'. See A. Dupont-Sommer, ed. *Le Mythe d'Orphé e aux animaux et ses Prolongements dans le Judaïsme, le Christianisme et l'Islam* ed., Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Conf. tenuta nella seduta del 5 giugno 1974, Roma 1975, 10-11.

²⁴ For the Christian-inspired in some of the British mosaics see Bowder, *op. cit.*, 159-160.

²⁵ Th. F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods. A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*,

in the tomb in stairway in the Cemetery of Domitilla, dated in the third century (Fig. 13); in an ivory in Bobbio Museum of the Abbey of St Columban, dated end of the fourth century;²⁶ (Fig. 14) in the catacombs of Saints Pietro and Marcellino in Rome²⁷ (Fig. 15) and; in one relief in the Museum Charbonneau-Lassay in Loudun (France) dated in 4th – 5th century.²⁸

At times this allegory is Christianized by the insertion of a figure of the Good Shepherd, that is, of Him who regulates the life of man and the course of the seasons. Among all these allegories, the only one which can truly be said to be mythological is that of Orpheus, found in the catacombs of Domitilla, Priscilla and Callistus. Its Christian significance is very clear: just as the Orpheus of paganism had overcome the savage beasts by the music of his lyre, so the Divine Orpheus, Jesus Christ, had transformed the pagan world by the sweetness of His doctrine.²⁹

The art of catacombs was able to absorb, in a purified form, some artistic themes which for the Christian world had become expressions of hope in a happier life beyond this world. It profited with the innocent poetry of the ancient myth of Orpheus, who sings and plays the lyre among the animals, easily transformed into a symbol of Christ. But the same iconographic term - the Good Shepherd - has different meanings according to the context (that is to say, according to the purpose of the given image).³⁰

Before that Virgil wrote the *Georgics*, his first collection of poems the Eclogues (c. 42-37 BC) had adapted to Rome, among other themes, a set of Greek pastoral or bucolic myths, relating to rural matters, and dealing with such topics as shepherds' singing contests and mutual bantering, laments for rustic lovers, and the like. This bucolic genre had been developed into a branch of Greek literature by Theocritus in the third century BC. Although Theocritus lived first, perhaps, at Cos and then at Alexandria-where he supported the crusade of Callimachus for short poems-he had been born at Syracuse, and it is to Sicily that

New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1993, 68-69.

²⁶ P. de Borguet, *op. cit.*, 53.

²⁷ M. A. Crippa, & M. Zibawi, *L'Arte Paleocristiana, Visione e Spazio dalle Origini a Bisanzio*, Milano 1998, 162, fig. 142.

²⁸ A. Dupont-Sommer ed., *Le Mythe d'Orphé e aux animaux et ses Prolongements dans le Judaïsme, le Christianisme et l'Islam*, Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Conf. tenuta nella seduta del 5 giugno 1974, Roma 1975, fig 8. See and *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie chrétienne et de Liturgie*, 1936, article Loudun, t. IX, col 2545 sq. (Cliché Musée Charbonneau-Lassay de Loudun).

²⁹ Orazio Marucchi and Hubert Vecchierello in their *Manual of Christian Archaeology* noted that: Among the Christianized allegories the only one which can truly be said to be mythological is that of Orpheus, but this representation is not frequent and is found in the catacombs of Domitilla, Priscilla and Callistus. Its Christian significance is very clear: just as the Orpheus of paganism had overcome the savage beasts by the music of his lyre, so the Divine Orpheus, Jesus Christ, had transformed the pagan world by the sweetness of this doctrine. See O. Marucchi, & H. Vecchierello, *Manual of Christian Archaeology*, New Jersey 1935, 274.

³⁰ A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography. A study of its Origins*, London 1969, xlix.



Fig. 19 Shepherd with Flocks or Pastoral Scene in a miniature, manuscript of Virgil, Georgics Book III, 29 BC, Vatikan, Biblioteca Apostolica, Rome

Сл. 19 Пастир са стадима и пастирске сцена у минијатури, рукопис Вергилија, Георгике књига III, 29 пре нове ере, Ватикан, Апостолска библиотека, Рим

the origin of these shepherd myths belongs. Tradition, however, came to associate them with the singing competitions of rustic Arcadia, in Greece itself, and Virgil blends references to the countryside with allusions to the region of his native north Italian Mantua as well.³¹

On the other hand, the Orpheus myth was much in vogue with fourth-century pagan also, often, it would seem, as a kind of counterpoise to Christ. Certainly paganism is dominant on the figured mosaics with which the principal rooms of the most luxurious houses were often floored. But the use of pagan mythology for decorative purposes presents a problem. It formed the common cultural background of pagan and Christian alike, and much of

it was quite unexceptionable to Christians, being as innocent of truly pagan content as, for example, the classicizing art of Renaissance and the presentation of the Good Shepherd.³² Julian himself calls Orpheus 'the most ancient of the inspired philosophers', while Chemistries uses him as a simile for Constantius charming the usurper Vetranio. It must not be forgotten, however, that the subject of Orpheus and the animals lent itself to a composition of great charm in which the master craftsman could display all his skill, so we should not be too quick to read religious significance, either Christian or pagan, into a particular example. This theme was not simple a problem of 'moda' at the end of Roman empire, but it fell from the rank of the arts to that of industry, and gave up the representation of life, to content itself with geometrical decoration. According to Hoddinott the good Shepherd was an essentially Early Christian subject.³³ The Orpheus and the bucolic types had both achieved wide popularity, but, with the transmutation of the theme into the resplendent, dignified and princely figure portrayed in the chapel of Galla Placidia in Ravenna (circa 450), (Fig.

³¹ M. Grant, *Myths of the Greeks and Romans*, Cleveland and New York 1962, 307.

³² For the Good Shepherd as "the only one Shepherd" see Crippa & Zibawi *op. cit.*, 161, fig. 139-141 with the sculptures of Good Shepherd in the Byzantine Museum of Athens (Fig. 16), the Good Shepherd in the Museum Pio Cristiano in Rome (Fig. 17) and the teenage Christ in the National Museum of Baths in Rome. See also Dupont-Sommer, *op. cit.*, 10.

³³ R. F. Hoddinott, *Early Byzantine Churches in Macedonia and Southern Serbia*, London, New York 1963, 217.

18) it had given way to such other Christological aspects as the Christ of Salvation and of the Logos, and to the child with the Virgin. One branch of late classical iconography furnished a great number of motifs for the first generations of Christian image-makers: this was pastoral imagery, whose principal motifs are the shepherd, his dog, his flock of lambs or goats or, more rarely, his herd of cows, or a rocky landscape with a few decorative trees and sometimes a few rustic buildings. In the Roman period, such visions of pastoral calm were the delight of city dwellers, and in mural decorations in particular they were frequent. However, the motif of the shepherd surrounded by his flock, like that of the shepherd carrying a sheep or the cowherd carrying a calf, is classical and pre-Christian. All these motifs were originally part of pagan pastoral symbolism (also called bucolic) which, from Theocritus to Virgil, praised the happiness and peacefulness of the pastoral life. It was also visually depicted, as for example the Pastoral Scene in a miniature, manuscript of Virgil.³⁴ (Fig. 19)

Illustrations for Virgil's works afforded Roman painters opportunity to treat the subject of the shepherd with his flock. And pagan funerary art took it up also, in its turn, and used it often in its evocations of the ideal sojourn in the afterlife. Connections between these figurations and the earliest Christian versions were all the more natural because Christianity in its funerary art itself reserved an important place for the subject of the shepherd and his flock. Christian iconography was certainly led to this subject by the Scriptures, which compare Jesus to the Good Shepherd and Christians to the flock that he



Fig. 22 Jerusalem mosaic with Orpheus (now in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum) (2 pictures)

Сл. 22 Јерусалимски мозаик са Орфејом (сада у археолошком музеју Истанбула) (2 слике)

³⁴ Shepherd guarding their flocks (Georgics III). Illuminated manuscript, first half of fifth century. Vergilius Vaticanus and especially the Vergilius Romanus, Vat. Lat. 3867, 44 v. Vatican, Apostolic Library. See P. de Borghet, *op. cit.*, 199.



Fig. 24 Detail with Geometrical and Floral motives in the Orpheus mosaic of Durres

Сл. 24 Детаљ са 24 геометријским и цветним мотивима у Орфејом мозаику у Драчу

guards.³⁵ The Good Shepherd is a characteristic piece of Hellenic allegory, but as the illustration of a Christian text by a time-honored type of Hellenic and Hellenistic art with examples dating from the archaic cult-images of the Hermes Criophorus, bearing a ram on his shoulders, to similar Greco-Roman renderings of the shepherd-hero Aristaeus. The influence of the Hellenic mysteries on this early Christianity is apparent in occasional pictures of Orpheus, with lyre and Phrygian cap, surrounded by his beasts.³⁶

The New Testament speaks of the lost sheep which is returned to the flock by the Good Shepherd Jesus Christ (Matt. 18.12 ff.; Luke 15.3 ff.; compare John 10). But something of the classical bucolic symbolism was retained also in early Christianity, and it could be combined with the symbolism of Orpheus, who tamed the animals with the music of his lyre. There are several catacomb paintings in which Orpheus, to all appearances, takes the place of Christ, as in the San Callisto catacomb (Fig. 20) or in the Cemetery of Domitilla, (Fig. 21) both in Rome.³⁷ (Fig. However, in the pictorial art of late antiquity and the early Christian period it is often only the context that reveals whether we are dealing with a Christian or a pagan work of art with shepherd or Orpheus symbolism.³⁸ A symbol from the first stages of Christianity, Christ as Orpheus was adopted

³⁵ See A. Grabar, *op. cit.*, 35-36, Color Plate Ii.

³⁶ Ch. F. Morey, *Early Christian Art. An Outline of the Evolution of Style and Iconography in Sculpture and Painting from Antiquity to the Eighth Century* 2nd ed., Princeton New Jersey-London-Oxford 1953, 63-64.

³⁷ The picture of Orpheus is twice found in the cemetery of Domitilla, and once in that of Callistus. One on the ceiling in Domitilla, apparently from the second century, is especially rich: it represents the mysterious singer, seated in the centre on a piece of rock, playing on the lyre his enchanting melodies to wild and tame animals—the lion, the wolf, the serpent, the horse, the ram—at his feet—and the birds in the trees.

³⁸ G. B. Ladner, *God, Cosmos, and Humankind*, 1995, 135-138. See and P. de Borghet, *op. cit.* 52-53.

from an identifiable pagan mythology. In this form, with lyre in hand, Christ is represented as the tamer of all living things, and an attractive and centrifugal force in the lives of all beings.³⁹

Of course, the image of Orpheus with the accompanying cadre of beautiful plants and exquisitely detailed animals, both real and imagined, made for a beautiful ornamental design in any context. Sometimes, even during the Christian period, a decorative image of Orpheus was simply that: an image of Orpheus. In the case of the famous sixth-century A.D. Jerusalem mosaic (now in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum), (Fig. 22) which depicts an exquisitely detailed image of Orpheus that was originally interpreted as a representation of Christ as Orpheus playing his lyre, it is likely that the figure is simply an artistic panel that recalls a quaint and harmless story from an older time. A similar figure in a synagogue mosaic is discovered in Gaza, resembling the traditional form of Orpheus but labeled "David", may be thought to support this interpretation of Orpheus as Christ. (Fig. 23) But on closer examination the comparison falters allows unpacking the double identity: Orpheus as David and Orpheus as Christ? Although Orpheus taming the animals with his lyre is the central panel, it is only a small part of a grand mosaic floor that includes a series of registers, each with panels of figural imagery inset into the complex and delightful decorative framing typical of Roman mosaics.⁴⁰

The mosaic of Dyrrachium used the same theme, as in other known mosaics, and the religious beliefs and atmosphere of the period were reflected in it. In order to give some idea of the tremendous wealth of artistic invention and craftsmanship that could go into the creation of this floor of a single room, probably the principal reception room of the villa, which this undoubtedly was. We had not possibilities to enlarge the surface of excavation because the mosaic



Fig. 25 Orpheus in the Orpheus mosaic of Durres

Сл. 25 Орфеј у Орфејовом мозаику у Драчу

³⁹ See F. E. Hulme, *The History Principles and Practice of Symbolism in Christian Art*, New York: Macmillan & Co., 1891.

⁴⁰ See R. Ling, *Ancient Mosaics*, London: British Museum Press, 1998 and K. M. D. Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, New York: Cambridge University Press 1999.



Fig. 26 Detail with Animals and trees around Orpheus in the Orpheus mosaic of Durres

Сл. 26 Детаљ са животињама и дрвећем око Орфеја у Орфејом мозаику у Драчу

is under the fundaments of a living house, but there are visible the several parts of it. The surface of this mosaic is 1.72 x 1.66 m. and 1.10 x 0.78 m., divided in these two parts from the fundament walls of the house constructed over it. The first part is composed with geometrical motifs: rhombus with sides 17 cm, quadrangles with sides 34 cm; and with floral motifs inside: rosettes with four petals; the Solomon star, etc... The tress motif goes around this geometrical composition. (Fig. 24) The second part is with Orpheus and animals. (Fig. 25, Fig. 26, Fig. 27) There are small *tesserae* used, 0.6 cm. and 0.4 cm.⁴¹

It is always mentioned that the first Christian “monuments” appeared at a relatively late date in relation to the birth of Christianity. The exact moment of their appearance is by no means easy

to ascertain. Indeed, opinion has varied widely on this point. Although some have thought to trace it back to the beginning of the second century, it is now generally agreed that it must have coincided with the beginning of the third.⁴²

Early Christian art might be defined as the art of Christianity’s “infancy” and there are two truly epoch-making dates: the imperial edict of 380 that made Christianity a state religion and that of 391 that forbade pagan worship. These were sovereign interventions of the temporal power in the religious sphere. Their net effect was to involve the emperors and, by repercussion the hierarchy of the Church in every area directly affected by religion and, in particular, religious art.⁴³ The first phase of the early Christian period was one not of totally, but of partially clandestine activity. All need for secrecy ended in 313 with the Edict of Milan, in which Constantine and Licinius jointly annulled all previous anti-Christian measures. Although it stopped short of proclaiming Christianity the state religion, the Edict of Milan removed all existing constraints and in particular consigned to the past the persecution that had characterized the resistance of

⁴¹

M. Zeqo, ‘Rezultate të Gërmimeve Arkeologjike’, *Iliria* 1989/2, Tiranë 1989, 145-146.

⁴² P. de Borguet, *op. cit.*, 7.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, 8.

pagan civilization to the inroads of the new faith. It created a benign climate in which the Church could flourish. The crucial battle had been won. Publicly and with semiofficial backing Christianity was now free to expand in every sphere of religious activity and more particularly in architecture and in plastic and in pictorial expression of its beliefs. Clearly as compared with the obscurity and sufferings of the third century, the fourth, starting from 313 may be called the period of broad daylight.⁴⁴ The late third and early fourth centuries were vast changes in government, society, and religion. The impact of such factors on the history of art was undoubtedly significant, yet the precise mechanism through which changes in art took place is difficult to define.⁴⁵ The prominence of Illyrians among the Tetrarchs⁴⁶ and their frequent presence in the strategic Balkan provinces encouraged construction there during this period. Several of these structures have floor mosaics.⁴⁷

The end of the period is for many perhaps even more vague. In fact art that extend it as far as Justinian's century, thus absorbing a number of "monuments" that must be considered direct precursors, if not indeed an integral part, of Byzantine art. The ambiguity appears to derive from the coincidence to within a few years of the liberation of the Church and the foundation of Constantinople.⁴⁸



Fig. 27 Detail with Animals and trees around Orpheus in the Orpheus mosaic of Durrës

Сл. 27 Детаљ са животињама и дрвећем око Орфеја у Орфејевом мозаику у Драчу

⁴⁴ *Id.* 18.

⁴⁵ Studied most comprehensively in H. P. L'Orange, *Art, Forms and Civil Life in the late Roman Empire*, Princeton 1965.

⁴⁶ Four of the original Tetrarchs were Illyrians: Diocletian from Salona in Dalmatia, Maximian from near Sirmium in Panonia, Constantius Chlorus from near Naissus in Moesia, and Galerius from Romuliana in new Dacia. See R. Kolarik, 'The late antique floor mosaics in the Balkans', *Nis & Byzantium IV*, Nis 2005; R. Kolarik, 'Tetrarchic Floor Mosaics in the Balkans', *La Mosaïque gréco-romaine IV*, Paris 1994, 171-183.

⁴⁷ R. Kolarik, 'Tetrarchic Floor Mosaics in the Balkans', *La Mosaïque gréco-romaine IV*, Paris 1994, 171. She understands the period of the Tetrarchy to extend from its foundation by Diocletian in 293 to Constantine's establishment of sole rule by defeating Licinius in 324.

⁴⁸ P. de Borguet, *op. cit.*, 7.

The very fine mosaic in a villa at Dyrrachium dated in the époque before the Justinian's century.⁴⁹ It may be compared with the mosaic from Sparta, but in our case we can't see the lyre because of the damage in mosaic. It is interesting that although Orpheus has the same expression and the same type of hat as in other mosaics, in Dyrrachium he is not between wild beasts as in general Orpheus is, but there is a goat, a kid, a calf and birds. It is one of eastern Orpheus mosaic of the third to fourth centuries illustrates a development in the representation of the singer and his audience departing from the naturalistic figure style inherited from Greek art. This is not similar with the depiction of the Good Shepherd with his lamb or surrounded by lambs in the paintings of the Roman catacombs (e.g. the Priscilla and Domitilla catacombs).⁵⁰ Significantly, it does appear to have been laid by a local team of mosaics workshop.⁵¹ This locus mosaic workshop has an old tradition in this city from Greek and Roman periods.⁵² It is a province style with very high artistically level. The remains of this extremely rich and luxurious mosaic, is among the finest products of the Constantinian period.

This is probably one of the last testimonies before the earthquake of 346 A.D. and the division of Roman Empire at c. 395 A.D.. After that city began the new type of life and the new construction, although both paganism and Christianity faced difficult cultural chooses in both the third and the fourth centuries.⁵³

⁴⁹ L. Bréhier, *L'Art Byzantin*, Paris 1924, 19. He classified the history of Byzantine art in five great periods: 1. Before Justinian (IV-V cen.), 2. Epoque of Justinian (VI-VII cen.), 3. After Justinian, 4. Epoque iconoclaste, 5. After XIII cen. For the mosaïque of Orpheus in Justinian period see Mano-Zissi, D. 'La question des différentes Écoles de Mosaïques Gréco-Romaines de Yougoslavie et essai d'une Esquisse de leur Évolution', *La Mosaïque Gréco-Romaine*, Colloques Internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris 29 Août-3 Septembre 1963, Paris 1965, 293, fig. 28.

⁵⁰ G. B. Ladner, *God, Cosmos, and Humankind*, 1995, 135, fig. 80, 81.

⁵¹ Ruth Kolarik thinks that Thessaloniki may well be the source of the Split, Sirmium, Romuliana (Gamzigrad), and Mediana near Naissus (Nis) mosaicists. See R. Kolarik, 'Tetrarchic Floor Mosaics in the Balkans', *La Mosaïque gréco-romaine IV*, Paris 1994, 171-183.

⁵² For other mosaics in Durrës, see M. Zeqo, 'Rezultate të Gërmimeve Arkeologjike', *Iliria* 1988/2, Tiranë 1988, 259.

⁵³ A. Momigliano, ed., *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, Oxford 1963, 300-301.

Лида Фабијан Мирај
ОРФЕЈ - ЕВОЛУЦИЈА МИТА У ГРЧКОМ, РИМСКОМ, РАНОХРИШЋАНСКОМ
ПЕРИОДУ И МОЗАИК ОРФЕЈА У ДРАЧУ

У касној антици, паганизам је свакако доминантан на приказаним мозаицима са којима су главне просторије најлуксузнијих кућа често биле поплочане. Међутим, употреба паганске митологије формирала заједничку културну основу паганске и хришћанске сличности, утолико што није било тако ретоко за хришћане, постојеће као невини пагански садржај као, на пример, класична уметност ренесансе. Доказ за то је постојање споменика са мешавином хришћанских и паганских мотива.

Тема Орфеја који очарава звери је усвојена од стране хришћана као паралела и симбол Христа, доброг пастира који привлачи и кротки човечанство, још у II веку, као што је познато од писаца и са фресака катакомби. Сам Јулијан назива Орфеја „најстаријим од надахнутих филозофа“, док Кемистрије га користи као поређења за Констанција који очарава узурпатора Ветранија. Не сме се заборавити, међутим, да је тема Орфеја и животиња узета у композицији велике привлачности у којој су велики мајстори могли да прикажу сву своју вештину, тако да не треба превише брзо тумачити религијски значај, било хришћанског или паганског, у конкретном примеру.

Мозаик у Драчу користио је исту тему, као и у другим познатим мозаицима, а верска уверења и атмосфера периода одражена су у њему. Да би се створила идеја о огромном богатству уметничког стварања и израде које је могло бити укључено у стварање пода једне собе, вероватно главне собе у вили за пријем, што је ово несумњиво било. Нисмо имали могућности за повећање површине ископавања, јер је мозаик под темељима куће у употреби, али постоји неколико видљивих делова истог. Површина овог мозаика је 1,72 x 1,66 м. и 1,10 x 0,78 м, подељена у ова два дела темељним зидовима куће изграђене над њим. Први део се састоји из геометријских мотива: ромб са странама 17cm, квадратима са странама 34cm, и са цветним мотивима унутра: розете са четири латице, Соломонова звезда, итд. Мотив увојка иде око овог геометријског састава. Други део је са Орфејом и животињама. Постоје мале коришћене плочице, величине 0,6 cm и 0,4 cm.

Ова радионица мозаика има стару традицију у овом граду још од грчких и римских периода. То је стил покрајине са веома високим уметничким нивоом. Остаци овог изузетно богатог и луксузног мозаика је међу најбољим производима константиновог периода.

То је вероватно један од последњих сведочења пред земљотрес 346. и поделе Римског царства 395. године. Након тога град је почео нову врсту живота и нове изградње, иако су и паганизам и хришћанство били суочени са тешким културним изборима у III и IV веку.

