

# The Chariot and Its Antagonist Steeds About Aeschylus' *Persae* 171-200 and Plato's *Phaedrus* 246ab

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**Abstract** This study deals with the image of the chariot and its steeds in the imagery of some crucial Greek texts suggesting a number of Iranian resonances, which show the presence of corresponding themes and motifs well rooted within the Mazdean mythology and its poetical language. The article actually proposes a new approach to famous passages, such as Parmenides' proem to the poem *On Nature*, Aeschylus' *Persae* 171-20, Plato's *Phaedrus* 24, and suggests an original interpretation of the ideological (Barbarian = Persian) role assumed by the victorious Greek king in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, when he appears in front of his palace and his wife Clytemnestra. Some aspects of Atossa's dreams, in particular their symbolic complexity, are dealt with in the framework of a comparative Greek-Persian dimension.

**Keywords** Horses and chariots. Iranian mythology. Aeschylus' *Persae*. Plato's *Phaedrus*. Dreams. Dualisms. Interculturality.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 An Iranian Additional Correspondence for the Second Omen Seen by Queen Atossa? – 3 The Chariot of Agamemnon and the Image of the Barbarian King. – 4 Provisory Conclusions.

## 1 Introduction

The care<sup>1</sup> of horses in the Iranian world was an important task and has duly left its mark on the onomastics;<sup>2</sup> a similar attitude characterised Greek culture,<sup>3</sup> where using chariots and training horses were a traditional custom as well, and this tradition produced interesting equitation manuals as those left by Xenophon.<sup>4</sup> Such a common interest in hippological matters must have attracted a mutual curiosity and encouraged the diffusion of various mythological or epic stories concerning horses and their symbolical meaning. This premise is foundational for the following considerations about the presence of some possible Iranian resonances within the Greek intellectual production of its golden age.

The first subject I would like to consider occurs in the text of Aeschylus' tragedy *Persae* (a tragedy performed in 472 BCE, exactly 7 years after the end of Xerxes' invasion), where we find a pivotal role given to the dreams<sup>5</sup> of the queen Atossa,<sup>6</sup> the mother of Xerxes and

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**2** Sadovski (2009) has offered a systematic description of this phenomenon with a detailed and wide-ranging bibliographical sketch. Cf. also Sparreboom 1983; Oettinger 1994; Skjærvø 2008.

**3** See Dubois 2000; cf. Plath 1994. For the horse in the Graeco-Roman world, see Vigneron 1968; Clements 2007.

**4** I emphasise in passing the importance of texts such as Xenophon's *De equitatione* and the *Hippiarchicum*; see the French editions by Delebecque of these books by Xenophon 1973 and 1978. We cannot forget that Iranians and Greeks shared a keen interest in the dog, which was very important in Mazdaism. For Xenophon's work on dogs, see the *Kynegetikos*, for which see another edition by Delebecque 1970.

**5** For the literature on the Greek treatment of dreams, see Hundt 1935; Lennig 1969, 47-53; Petrounias 1976, 10-12; Kessels 1978; Moreau 1993, 20-52; Walde 2001; Vamvouri Ruffy 2004, 11, 19, 25; Giebel 2006; Grethlein 2007, 373; Papadimitropoulos 2008, 452-3; Guidorizzi 2013. About dreams in the ancient Iranian framework, see Stuhmann 1982 and Panaino 2015. Very interesting is the treatment of Atossa's dream by West 1997, 547-9, who mostly insists on some Assyrian parallels in the framework of the relations between East and West. With close regard to the subject of dreams in Aeschylus, see the recent contribution by Abbate 2017.

**6** About the historical existence of Atossa, previously questioned by Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1983), now see Stolper (2018), who emphasises the pertinent documentation of the Elamite tablets belonging to the Persepolis Archive. Her name is usually connected with the Avestan stem *Hutaosa-* (Parthian *Hwdws*) and it is attested in the Elamite documentation as *Ū-du-sa-na*, which seems to be an adaptation of

wife of the deceased king Darius I.<sup>7</sup> These dreams have attracted the attention of many scholars, who have discussed their contents from different points of view,<sup>8</sup> in some case with very original methods: Devereux, for instance, treated it in a psychoanalytic frame, and was criticised for it.<sup>9</sup>

This is the pertinent passage (*Persae* 176-200), spoken by queen Atossa:<sup>10</sup>

πολλοῖς μὲν αἰεὶ νυκτέροις ὄνειρασι  
 ξύνειμι, ἀφ' οὔπερ παῖς ἔμὸς στείλας στρατὸν  
 Ἰαόνων γῆν οἴχεται πέρσαι θέλων·  
 ἀλλ' οὔτι πω τοιόνδ' ἔναργές εἰδόμην  
 ὡς τῆς πάροιθεν εὐφρόνης· λέξω δέ σοι. 180  
 ἔδοξάτην μοι δύο γυναῖκ' εὐείμονε,  
 ἡ μὲν πέπλοισι Περσικοῖς ἡσκημένη,  
 ἡ δ' αὖτε Δωρικοῖσιν, εἰς ὄψιν μολεῖν,  
 μεγέθει τε τῶν νῦν ἐκπρεπεστάτα πολὺ  
 κάλλει τ' ἀμώμω, καὶ κασιγνήτα γένους 185  
 ταύτου· πάτραν δ' ἔναιον ἡ μὲν Ἑλλάδα  
 κλήρω λαχοῦσα γαῖαν, ἡ δὲ βάρβαρον.  
 τούτῳ στάσιν τιν', ὡς ἐγὼ ᾄδοκουν ὄραν,  
 τεύχειν ἐν ἀλλήλοισι· παῖς δ' ἔμὸς μαθῶν  
 κατεῖχε κἀπράννευ, ἄρμασιν δ' ὑπο 190  
 ζεύγνυσιν αὐτῶ καὶ λέπαδν' ὑπ' ἀυχένων  
 τίθησι. χῆ μὲν τῆδ' ἐπυργούτο στολῆ

an Old Persian stem such as \*(hu)tōhāna-. See Tavernier 2007, 212 (n° 4.2.835); Mayrhofer 1979, 52 (n° 179).

**7** I must call readers' attention to an article by Piras (2017, 82-5), in which my colleague shows the intriguing intercultural net linking the appearance of the ghost of Darius in this tragedy and the complex reception of Iranian demonology in the Greek sources (e.g. the Derveni papyrus and Lucian's *Menippus*).

**8** See, for instance, von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf 1897, 386; Messer 1918, 63; Pohlenz 1954, 64 (= 1978, 67); Di Virgilio 1973, 36-7; Belloni 1988; Court 1994, 32-5; Lenz 1986; Moreau 1993; Cristofoli 1999; Walde 2001, 73-88. On Atossa and the Chorus, see Schenker 1994. For our topic Lincoln's study (2011, 529-31, *passim*) is important, where the 'sisterhood' between Europa and Asia is compared with the motif adopted by Aeschylus with reference to the two maidens appearing in Atossa's dream. Lincoln is right in the analysis of this comparison, which has a documented background, although the dualism Persia/Greece is not excluded, although it plays the role of an allegory. In fact, the two countries represent not just two 'nations', but two cultural ethno-cultural areas, then two 'continents'; Lincoln insists on the dialectics between these two geopolitical areas in the second part of his study. Cf. also Walde 2001, 82-3.

**9** Devereux 1976 and 2006, 1-27. Cf. also Caldwell 1970, 81-3; Vandendorpe 2007. See, for instance, Diggle 1978; very important is the discussion by Walde 2001, 465-70. See also Rexine 1977.

**10** For the Greek text, see West 1991, 11-12. Cf. the Loeb edition and translation by Sommerstein 2008, 32-5; the French edition by Mazon (Aeschylus 1969, 68-9); and the new study by Garvie 2009, 10-11, 100-22.

ἐν ἡνίασι τ' εἶχεν εὐαρκτον στόμα·  
 ἢ δ' ἐσφάδαζε, καὶ χεροῖν ἔντη δίφρου  
 διασπαράσσει καὶ ξυναρπάζει βίᾳ 195  
 ἄνευ χαλινῶν, καὶ ζυγὸν θραύει μέσον.  
 πίπτει δ' ἐμὸς παῖς· καὶ πατὴρ παρίσταται  
 Δαρεῖος οἰκτίρων σφε· τὸν δ' ὅπως ὄρα  
 Ξέρξης, πέπλους ῥήγνυσιν ἀμφὶ σώματι.  
 καὶ ταῦτα μὲν δὴ νυκτὸς εἰσιδεῖν λέγω. 200

Dreams of the night have been my frequent companions ever since my son led out his army and departed in order to lay waste the land of the Ionians;<sup>11</sup> but never yet have I had one that was so plain as during the night just past. I will tell you about it. There seemed to come into my sight two finely dressed women, one arrayed in Persian, the other in Doric robes, outstandingly superior in stature to the women of real life, of flawless beauty, and sisters of the same stock: one, by the fall of the lot, was a native and inhabitant of the land of Greece, the other of the Orient. I seemed to see these two raising some kind of strife between themselves; my son, perceiving this, tried to restrain and calm them, yoked them under his chariot, and passed the yoke-strap under their necks. One of them, thus arrayed, towered up proudly, and kept her jaw submissively in harness; but the other began to struggle, tore the harness from the chariot with her hands, dragged it violently along without bridle or bit, and smashed the yoke in half. My son fell out. His father Darius appeared, standing beside him and showing pity; but when Xerxes saw him, he tore the robes that clothed his body. That, I say, is what I saw in the night.

In the discussion of this source, my analytic focus will be on the narrative pattern, which seems to be inspired by an archaic motif and which concerns the act of yoking two discordant or even hostile horses (better, mares).<sup>12</sup> This image is actually adopted by Aeschylus, when he introduces the dream of Atossa: on that occasion, the queen announces that she has dreamt two women (δύο γυναῖκ'), one recognisably a 'Persian', the other a 'Greek' (although the text refers to her 'Doric' robe, perhaps in order to emphasise the Spartan simplicity),<sup>13</sup> quarrelling with each other (στάσιον τιν' [...] τεύχειν ἐν

<sup>11</sup> See now Nagy 2018.

<sup>12</sup> The ambivalent allegory mares (horses)/maidens is so dense and deep that Walde (2001, 83) speaks of "Sinnüberschuß". In fact, according to the interpretation of the passage, we may insist on the fact that these maidens play on ethnic identities, but also that the association with horses, as animals sacred to Poseidon, can be equally associated with the image of the ships, and then to the battle of Salamis.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. also Garvie 2009, 88.

ἀλλήλαισι), so that Xerxes was compelled to yoke<sup>14</sup> them to a chariot (dat. pl. in the text; ἄρμασιν).<sup>15</sup> But, while the Persian lady accepted the rein and bridle without any protest, affirming the motif of the Persian δουλεία, the Greek one rebelled, tearing off the harness, breaking the yoke<sup>16</sup> and making Xerxes fall down from the chariot.<sup>17</sup> And this was an explicit *omen* announcing the victory of the Greek army over the Persian king.<sup>18</sup>

**14** Again Lincoln (2011, 532-3) analyses the use of the verb κατέχω, whose semantics implies also a tyrannical domination, together with παύνω 'to make soft, calm', which covers also the meaning of an animal-taming.

**15** Bridges (2012) connects this image with the one previously suggested by the Chorus (v. 84) that presents Xerxes as riding on a chariot at the head of his army. The plural is used here instead of the singular, but the reference was clearly to only one chariot, because Xerxes was not trying to harness each woman to a different chariot; in fact, in that way the story would be meaningless. The king falls down from the chariot because one of the two horses (the Greek woman) is rebelling. Otherwise, how could Xerxes ride two chariots at the same time? In any case it is useful to follow Moreau (1993, 42) and Lincoln (2011, 534 fn. 24) in the quotation of Artemidorus' *Interpretation of Dreams* 3.18-19 (cf. Del Corno 2002, 182), which classified a dream where one yokes another to a chariot as meaning slavery for the yoked party and mastery for the yoking one. This subject has been developed by Walde (2001, 82-3), who not only considered Artemidorus' classification, but also interpreted the association of women and mares as reflecting a sexual motif; Lincoln in turn has observed that the fall of Xerxes from the chariot, too, reflects a sexual motif. This subject was discussed already by Devereux 1976, 8. M. Zaccarini kindly suggests to me that "a similar imagery is also e.g. in Herodotus 7.8γ.1, but especially this image is reciprocated by that of Athens and Sparta during the Persian wars as yoke-fellows, i.e. sharing the burden of defending Greece (see e.g. Ion of Chios FGrHist 392 F 14 (ap. Plut. *Cim.* 16.10) on the threat to break this alliance in Cimon's time). On the persistence of the metaphor, cf. its use again by Alcaeus of Messene to praise T.Q. Flaminus in the 2nd c. BC (*AP* 16.5). Some more discussion and *comparanda* can be found in Zaccarini 2017, 38-40. Very interestingly, my colleague Alessandro Iannucci remarks that the famous fragment 7 by Semonides includes a passage (fr. 7, 38-70 W.), in which a type of woman is compared to a horse under a negative light; see the pertinent discussion in the edition commented by Pellizer (1990).

**16** That the yoke was a symbol of subjugation is patently confirmed at *Pers.* 50, where "the yoke of slavery" is mentioned: ζυγὸν ἀμφιβαλεῖν δούλιον Ἑλλάδι. Cf. Futo Kennedy 2013, 80. West (1997, 547-8) suggests a comparison between the two sisters who stand for Persia and Greece and the two sisters symbolising Samaria and Jerusalem, which were mentioned by Ezekiel.

**17** In any case, as Lincoln (2011, 530-3) remarks, both sisters are of equal size and beauty; furthermore, no primacy distinguishes them. Thus, Lincoln can rightly state: "National or ethnic identity is thus constituted as a difference of *nomos*, not *physis*". According to Lincoln, their conflict appears also inter-familial, and not inter-ethnic! It is interesting to note that only the Persian mare behaves according to the expected female pattern, while the Greek one resists against tyranny (Lincoln 2011, 533-4).

**18** The impression produced by this dream inspired a British artist, George Romney, who produced two remarkable drawings, one dedicated to the representation of the broken chariot of Xerxes as in the dream of Atossa and another to the Ghost of Darius appearing to the queen. They are presently viewable at the Walker Art Gallery of Liverpool. See Paley 2011 and Lincoln 2011.

The image of discordant forces<sup>19</sup> yoked to the same chariot also occurs in Plato's *Phaedrus* (246ab), where the two horses, one white and one black, pull the charioteer in different directions, one up, the other down, and it depends on the rational ability of the charioteer whether the chariot would ascend to the world of the ideas or descend to physical realm. This is a complex section in the discourse attributed to Socrates, which can be read at different interpretive levels and which has provided the occasion for detailed and complex reflections,<sup>20</sup> such as the one advanced by Ferrari,<sup>21</sup> or Belfiore's.<sup>22</sup> I will not discuss this pedagogical and allegorical myth in any detail since it goes beyond the scope of my topic. It is obviously important for Plato's understanding of the rational soul (with the tripartite role played by the charioteer and its two different drives, the 'rational' and the 'physical' one). I limit myself to exploring the possibility of the existence of foreign (i.e. non-Greek) motifs behind the Platonic image.

I underline the significant fact that the motif of fight between two yoked horses, in particular between a white horse and a black one, is not at all common in antiquity, whether in Greece or elsewhere. This conclusion is based on a rigorous statistical and comparative analysis of the relevant data by my colleague Dr. Eugenio Bortolini, to whose kindness I owe the detailed methodological note here published.<sup>23</sup> The

**19** We must prudently observe that the two women presented by Aeschylus do not struggle directly one against the other, although the result of their behavior implicitly points out to a certain rivalry, which is due to the Greek hostility against monarchy. In this respect, as Medda remarks (private communication), Aeschylus did not emphasize any kind of racial or ethnic hate against the Persians; the two women are actually 'sisters', so that the two nations could even stay in peace. The contrast is mainly between the Greek maiden and the Persian king, and not strictly between the two sisters, who quarrel, but are not properly fighting. I would like to underline this aspect, which shows an intrinsic mental openness by Aeschylus toward the Iranian world, a fact that makes the dialogic intercultural framework here suggested more fitting.

**20** See the approach adopted by Taylor (1968, 306-9), who describes this text as "a parable with the 'three parts' of the soul: the driver is judgment, the two horses are 'honour' or 'mettle' and 'appetite'. This allegory is frequently connected with the image of the soul as presented in the *Republic*, but Carelli 2014 argues against this connection, insisting on the fact that soul is a unity within the framework of the conclusions of the *Republic* or in the *Timaeus*.

**21** Ferrari 1987, 185-203.

**22** Belfiore 2006, why emphasises the role of the Sileni in the Platonic imagery.

**23** The spatiotemporal distribution of myths is a potential source of information on the mechanisms responsible for the spread of a particular theme or subject embedded in traditional narratives. A myth is a ubiquitous human expression involving the use of symbols framed into identifiable and often recurring narrative structures (Witzel 2012). Over the past two centuries the Comparative and Historical Method for studying human mythology has been trying to address substantive questions concerning the origin of similarities between pairs of individual narratives or between groups/systems of traditional narratives. The most commonly advanced hypotheses for such similarities

presence in Iran and in Greece of this motif warrants a detailed investigation.

We may also assume that both Aeschylus and Plato knew of and read Parmenides' proem to his most famous work known with the title of *De Natura* (i.e., Περὶ φύσεως or *On Nature*).<sup>24</sup> In this text, the first twenty-three lines describe a young man journeying on a chariot, towed by two mares, daughters of the Sun, which ascends to the heavenly Gates of the Day and the Night. These are the pertinent verses quoted by Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* 7.111 ff.:<sup>25</sup>

are: a) common origin (which may also be universal and shared by all humankind); b) transmission due to contact between groups; c) the movement of ideas - not necessarily entailing the movement of people; and d) convergence (i.e., the simultaneous/independent emergence of the same idea without any contacts, interaction, exchange of information, or common ancestry between groups or individuals). The above-mentioned perspective, at present, also draws on the use of quantitative methods for exploring variability in traditional narratives as well as testing hypotheses on the many different processes of cultural transmission involved in the spread of myths and folktales (d'Huy 2013; Ross, Greenhill, Atkinson 2013; Tehrani 2013; Ross, Atkinson 2016; Bertolini et al. 2017; Thuillard et al. 2018, among others). This approach is only possible through the systematic comparison of myths or folkloric accounts based on the identification and description of their components. Each myth emerges from the combination and cumulative elaboration of 'motifs' (*sensu* Berezkin 2015a) which are the minimum units of information transmitted across generations and continents. These units undergo either systematic choice or non-selective copying at a population level, and may present with differential persistence over time. There is compelling evidence attesting the stability of specific motifs (Thuillard et al. 2018), which make these transmitted bits a suitable unit for understanding how mythology changes through time and to measure the impact of human movement and interaction on the transmission of ideas. At present, the most conspicuous and complete catalogue of human mythology consists of the database built and edited by Yuri Berezkin (2015b; <http://ruthenia.ru/folklore/berezkin/eng.html>), that contains over 2264 motifs manually collected from 934 human populations at a global scale. The author thoroughly collated materials written in different languages with the aim of creating an unbiased worldwide catalogue of motifs, in which non-European regions could be equally well represented (as opposed to previous catalogues such as the one elaborated by Thompson in 1955-58 or the Aarne-Thompson-Uther index for international folktale types; Uther 2004; Thuillard et al. 2018). As far as the present case study is concerned, we extensively searched for any evidence of the motif of interest in Berezkin's database. Although there are many motifs involving horses, some of which suggest a long-term and possibly ancestral link between horses and cosmic/astral entities, only two motifs (k85 and k85A) seem to entail a dualism between competing forces embodied in a pair of horses. None of them, however, seem to explicitly refer to a black and a white horse bound to the same cart and representing opposite forces or contrasting desires, nor the opposition between celestial and underworld waters. This apparent lack of shared mythological references across Eurasia, where horse appearance is comparatively late from both a mythological and linguistic point of view (Witzel 2012), could possibly hint at an even more recent emergence of this elaborate metaphor, and at a contextual transmission limited to Western Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean Sea.

<sup>24</sup> On the relations between Parmenides and Plato, see Palmer 1999, and especially Slaveva-Griffin 2003.

<sup>25</sup> See 28 B 1 Diels-Kranz. Cf. also the text for the Loeb collection, edited and translated by Laks, Most 2016, 32-7.

ἐναρχόμενος γοῦν τοῦ Περι φύσεως γράφει τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον·

ἵπποι ταί με φέρουσιν, ὅσον τ' ἐπὶ θυμὸς ἰκάνοι,  
πέμπον ἐπεὶ μ' ἐς ὁδὸν βῆσαν πολύφημον ἄγουσαι  
δαίμονος, ἢ κατὰ πάντ' ἄστη φέρει εἰδότα φῶτα·  
τῇ φερόμην· τῇ γάρ με πολύφραστοι φέρον ἵπποιοι  
ἄρμα τιταίνουσαι, κοῦραι δ' ὁδὸν ἡγεμόνευον. 5  
ἄξων δ' ἐν χνοίησιν ἴει σύριγγος αὐτήν  
αἰθόμενος (δοιοῖς γὰρ ἐπείγετο δινωτοῖσιν  
κύκλοις ἀμφοτέρωθεν), ὅτε σπερχοίατο πέμπειν  
Ἑλιάδες κοῦραι, προλιποῦσαι δώματα Νυκτός  
εἰς φάος, ὡσάμεναι κράτων ἄπο χερσὶ καλύπτρας. 10  
ἔνθα πύλαι Νυκτός τε καὶ Ἥματός εἰσι κελεύθων,  
καὶ σφας ὑπέρθυρον ἀμφὶς ἔχει καὶ λαῖνος οὐδός·  
αὐτὰ δ' αἰθέριαι πληνται μεγάλοισι θυρέτροις·  
τῶν δὲ Δίκη πολύποινος ἔχει κληῖδας ἀμοιβούς.  
τὴν δὴ παρφάμεναι κοῦραι μαλακοῖσι λόγοισιν 15  
πεῖσαν ἐπιφραδέως, ὡς σφιν βαλανωτὸν ὀχῆα  
ἀπτερέως ὥσειε πυλέων ἄπο· ταὶ δὲ θυρέτρων  
χάσμι' ἀχανές ποίησαν ἀναπτάμεναι πολυχάλκους  
ἄξονας ἐν σύριγγιν ἀμοιβαδὸν εἰλιξασαὶ  
γόμοις καὶ περόνησιν ἀρηρότε· τῇ ῥα δι' αὐτέων 20  
ἰθὺς ἔχον κοῦραι κατ' ἀμαξιτὸν ἄρμα καὶ ἵππους.  
καὶ με θεὰ πρόφρων ὑπεδέξατο, χεῖρα δὲ χειρὶ  
δεξιτερὴν ἔλεν, ὧδε δ' ἔπος φάτο καὶ με προσηύδα·  
ὦ κοῦρ' ἀθανάτοισι συνάρορος ἡνιόχοισιν,  
ἵπποις ταί σε φέρουσιν ἰκάνων ἡμέτερον δῶ, 25  
χαῖρ', ἐπεὶ οὔτι σε μοῖρα κακὴ προὔπεμπε νέεσθαι  
τὴνδ' ὁδόν (ἦ γὰρ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων ἔκτος πάτου ἐστίν),  
ἀλλὰ Θέμις τε Δίκη τε. χρεὼ δέ σε πάντα πυθέσθαι  
ἡμὲν Ἀληθείης εὐπειθέος ἀτρεμῆς ἦτορ  
ἡδὲ βροτῶν δόξας, ταῖς οὐκ ἔνι πίστις ἀληθής. 30  
ἀλλ' ἔμπης καὶ ταῦτα μαθήσεται, ὡς τὰ δοκοῦντα  
χρῆν δοκίμως εἶναι διὰ παντὸς πάντα περῶντα.

The Proem of the Poem (D4)

At the beginning of his *On Nature* he writes as follows:

[The journey to the goddess]

The mares that carry me as far as ardor might go  
Were bringing me onward, after having led me and set me down  
[on the divinity's many-worded  
Road, which carries through all the towns (?) the man who  
[knows.

It was on this road that I was being carried: for on it the  
[much-knowing horses were carrying me,



Straining at the chariot, and maidens were leading the way. 5  
 The axle in the naves emitted the whistle of a flute  
 As it was heated (for it was pressed hard by two whirling  
 Wheels, one on each side), while the maidens of the Sun  
 Hastened to bring me, after they had left behind the palace  
 [of Night  
 Towards the light and had pushed back the veils from their  
 heads with their hands. 10  
 That is where the gate of the paths of Night and Day is,  
 And a lintel and a stone threshold hold it on both sides.  
 Itself ethereal, it is occupied by great doors,  
 And much-punishing Justice holds its alternating keys.  
 The maidens, cajoling her with gentle words, 15  
 Wisely persuaded her to thrust quickly back for them  
 The bolted bar from the gate. And when it flew open  
 It made a gaping absence of the doors, after rotating in turn  
 In their sockets the two bronze pivots  
 Fastened with pegs and rivets. There, through them, 20  
 The maidens guided the chariot and horses straight along the  
 way.  
 And the goddess welcomed me graciously, took my right hand  
 In her own hand, and spoke these words, addressing me:

[The beginning of the goddess' speech]  
 Young man, companion of deathless charioteers, you who  
 Have come to our home by the mares that carry you, 25  
 I greet you [or: Rejoice!]: for it is no evil fate that has sent you  
 [to travel  
 This road (for indeed it is remote from the paths of men),  
 But Right and Justice. It is necessary that you learn  
 everything,  
 Both the unshakeable heart of well-convincing (εὐπειθέος) truth  
 And the opinions of mortals, in which there is no true  
 [belief (πίστις). 30  
 But nonetheless you will learn this too: how opinions  
 Would have to be acceptable, forever penetrating all things (?]

The presence<sup>26</sup> of the motif of a chariot with a pair of mares (ἵπποι  
 ταί με φέρουσι) could be considered as an inspiring precedent<sup>27</sup> for

<sup>26</sup> In a remarkable dissertation Clements (2017, 7-27, *passim*) draws attention to the Parmenidean precedent of Plato's image of the charioteer driving a chariot guided by two horses.

<sup>27</sup> The two horses are doubtless female, see Garvie 2009, 116, 120.

the Aeschylean image of the two maidens yoked at Xerxes' chariot,<sup>28</sup> transposed to a political scene. In Plato's text,<sup>29</sup> which we will presently consider, the image of a skilful charioteer who speaks on his cosmic chariot hauled by two superb mares (which in Parmenides, too, carries the philosophical message of searching for the truth about nature) furnishes a frame for systematic reflection on the structure of the soul. If this connection is undeniable, we must nonetheless note that in Parmenides' proem the mares are not discordant. The mares, as daughters of the Sun (Ἡλιάδες κοῦραι), guide without any difficulty or discordance the cosmic chariot. On the other hand, both sources we are dealing with emphasise as a key element the occurrence of a direct irreducible contrast between the two mares or the two horses. Furthermore, Parmenides' charioteer has nothing in common with Xerxes,<sup>30</sup> and we may doubt whether Aeschylus intended to compare the Persian king with Parmenides' extraordinary traveller. For these reasons, in search of the origin of the motif of discordant horses, I introduce further themes. We must firstly consider the general Greek mythological and epic background:<sup>31</sup> Homeric gods and men journey on chariots, as we know, from Zeus to Telemachus. In this certainly incomplete catalogue, we can also mention Sappho's hymn to Aphrodite, ruling on the hearth of human beings, while flying on her "golden chariot yoked" (χρύσιον [...] ἄρμ' ὑπασδεύξαισα), drawn by fair and fast sparrows (κάλοι [...] ὄκκεες στροῦθοι).<sup>32</sup> In her short overview of the sources, Slaveva-Griffin<sup>33</sup> recalls, too, the chariot of the Muses (ἐν Μοισᾶν δίφρω), described by Pindar in his celebration of Epharmostos (*Ol.* 9.80-1).<sup>34</sup> The Homeric hymns clearly confirm that Greeks thought that Helios<sup>35</sup> flew across the heavens from east to west with "a gold-yoked chariot" (χρυσόζυγον ἄρμα) as did his sister Selene,<sup>36</sup> the Moon. Hades,<sup>37</sup> too, was given a golden chariot, in which he abducted Persephone. The divine chariot, very

**28** Walde (2001, 82-2) rightly insists on the analogy between chariot and power.

**29** See now the detailed analysis offered by Slaveva-Griffin 2003 about the parallel motifs and the Platonic philosophical development.

**30** It would be useful to recall that Herodotus 7.12-19 attributes a particularly deceptive dream to Xerxes; cf. Giebel 2006, 72-83; Guidorizzi (2013, 111-13) states that this is an example of "double dream". Cf. also Bodei Giglioni 2002.

**31** The importance of this tradition has been discussed by Slaveva-Griffin 2003: 231-2, *passim*. See also Clements 2017, 28-44.

**32** See fr. 1.8-9 Voigt (ed. Voigt 1971) = 1.8-9 Lobel Page (ed. Lobel, Page 1955). For this motif in the Vedic framework, see Swennen 2004, 71-80.

**33** Slaveva-Griffin 2003, 231-2, *passim*.

**34** West 2003, 158-9.

**35** West 2003, 214-15.

**36** West 2003, 216-19.

**37** See *h. Cer.* 2, West 2003.

frequently fashioned in gold, seems to be commonly attested among many different Indo-European peoples, and it was adopted also in the Indo-Iranian poetic and mythological framework.<sup>38</sup> But in these examples, the motif of antagonistic horses is absent and, although we can consider as ambiguous the role played by Hades, his horses follow his orders. The Platonic distinction between the pair of horses belonging to the gods, which are good and obedient, and that of human beings, which behave in contrastive or contradictory ways, has a pedagogical and allegorical value; this theme is clearly an innovation with respect to Aeschylus' image of the two rival mares.

Actually, I am not aware of any discussion of a possible influence of Aeschylus' motif (of discordant horses) on Plato,<sup>39</sup> but we can safely assume that Plato knew about the Parmenidean motif and the tragedy *Persae*. Furthermore, while the motif of the Platonic metempsychosis cannot be completely separated from Eastern influences,<sup>40</sup> the emphasis on discordance, symbolically embodied by the two horses (like the two disharmonic sisters in Aeschylus),<sup>41</sup> justifies a fresh examination of the literary (obviously oral) background of this theme.

It is useful to quote *in extenso* the text pertaining to Plato's famous description of the flight of the soul (*Phaedrus* 246ab):<sup>42</sup>

[25]. Περὶ μὲν οὖν ἀθανασίας αὐτῆς ἰκανῶς· περὶ δὲ τῆς ἰδέας αὐτῆς ὧδε λεκτέον· οἶον μὲν ἐστὶ, πάντῃ πάντως θείας εἶναι καὶ μακρᾶς διηγῆσεως, ᾧ δὲ ἔοικεν, ἀνθρωπίνης τε καὶ ἐλάττονος· ταύτῃ οὖν λέγωμεν. εἰοικέτω δὴ Ξυμφύτῳ δυνάμει ὑποπτέρου ζεύγους τε καὶ ἡνίοχου. θεῶν μὲν οὖν ἵπποι τε καὶ ἡνίοχοι πάντες αὐτοὶ τε ἀγαθοὶ

<sup>38</sup> On this fact, see West 2007, 252-4.

<sup>39</sup> On the Platonic adoption of mythological themes, see the discussion by Brisson 1998; 2004; Nagy 1990; 2004.

<sup>40</sup> About this tantalising subject, see the supportive arguments collected by Burkert 1985, 198-9, 298-303, 328; traditional studies against the presence of Oriental elements in Plato are those by Kerschensteiner 1945 and Koster 1951, but the general assessment of the problem is there presented according to an unilateral approach, as for instance visible in the many statements concerning general subject such as the influence of Babylonian astronomy and astral lore upon the Greek world, which is radically denied by means of a priori statements. I also have to observe that some opposite views were equally radical and uncritical. An intermediate path, prudent and critical, remains the better approach, but without prejudice against the intercultural phenomena, when we can expect them. In this case, my point, as already declared, is not that of showing a Platonic dependence upon the Oriental or Iranian doctrines, but to emphasise the intercultural motifs, which circulated between East and West, and that, thanks to the Achaemenian ethno-cultural space, which included also many Greek poleis and peoples, might have enlarged the intellectual sphere of the Greeks, in particular the most culturally gifted among them.

<sup>41</sup> See Walde 2001, 83-5 fn. 85.

<sup>42</sup> Text and translation according to the edition Loeb 1914, 470-3; translation by Fowler.

καὶ [B] ἔξ ἀγαθῶν, τὸ δὲ τῶν ἄλλων μέμικται· καὶ πρῶτον μὲν ἡμῶν ὁ ἄρχων Ξυνοφίδος ἠνιοχεῖ, εἶτα τῶν ἵππων ὁ μὲν αὐτῷ καλὸς τε καὶ ἀγαθὸς καὶ ἐκ τοιούτων, ὁ δὲ ἔξ ἐναντίων τε καὶ ἐναντίος· χαλεπὴ δὴ καὶ δύσκολος ἔξ ἀνάγκης ἢ περὶ ἡμᾶς ἠνιόχισις.

Concerning the immortality of the soul this is enough; but about its form we must speak in the following manner. To tell what it really is would be a matter for utterly superhuman and long discourse, but it is within human power to describe it briefly in a figure; let us therefore speak in that way. We will liken the soul to the composite nature of a pair of winged horses and a charioteer. Now the horses and charioteers of the gods are all good [B] and of good descent, but those of other races are mixed; and first the charioteer of the human soul drives a pair, and secondly one of the horses is noble and of noble breed, but the other quite the opposite in breed and character. Therefore in our case the driving is necessarily difficult and troublesome.

We must also consider *Phaedrus* 253de/254ae [= 34-5],<sup>43</sup> where the qualities and physical aspects of the two horses are described and directly connected with the moral qualities of the charioteer himself:

[34]. Καθάπερ ἐν ἀρχῇ τοῦδε τοῦ μύθου τριχῆ διειλόμην ψυχὴν ἐκάστην, ἵππομόρφω μὲν δύο [D] τινὲ εἶδη, ἠνιοχικὸν δὲ εἶδος τρίτον, καὶ νῦν ἔτι ἡμῖν ταῦτα μενέτω. τῶν δὲ δὴ ἵππων ὁ μὲν, φαιμέν, ἀγαθός, ὁ δ' οὐ· ἀρετὴ δὲ τίς τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἢ κακοῦ κακία, οὐ διείπομεν, νῦν δὲ λεκτέον. ὁ μὲν τοίνυν αὐτοῖν ἐν τῇ καλλίονι στάσει ὧν τό τε εἶδος ὀρθὸς καὶ διηρθρωμένος, ὑψαύχην, ἐπίγρυπος, λευκὸς ἰδεῖν, μελανόμματος, τιμῆς ἔραστης μετὰ σωφροσύνης τε καὶ αἰδοῦς, καὶ ἀληθινῆς δόξης ἑταῖρος, ἄπληκτος, κελεύματι μόνον καὶ λόγῳ ἠνιοχεῖται· [E] ὁ δ' αὖ σκολιός, πολὺς, εἰκὴ συμπεφορημένος, κρατεραύχην, βραχυτράχηλος, σιμοπρόσωπος, μελάγχρωτος, γλαυκόμματος, ὕφαιμος, ὕβρεως καὶ ἀλαζονείας ἑταῖρος, περὶ ὧτα λάσιος, κωφός, μάλιστα μετὰ κέντρων μόγις ὑπέικων. ὅταν δ' οὖν ὁ ἠνιόχος ἰδὼν τὸ ἐρωτικὸν ὄμμα, πάσαν αἰσθήσει διαθερμῆνας τὴν ψυχὴν, γαργαλισμοῦ τε καὶ [254]. πόθου κέντρων ὑποπλησθῆ, ὁ μὲν εὐπειθὴς τῷ ἠνιόχῳ τῶν ἵππων, αἰεὶ τε καὶ τότε αἰδοῖ βιαζόμενος, ἑαυτὸν κατέχει μὴ ἐπιτηδᾶν τῷ ἐρωμένῳ· ὁ δὲ οὔτε κέντρων ἠνιοχικῶν οὔτε μαστιγῶς ἔτι ἐντρέπεται, σκιρτῶν δὲ βίᾳ φέρεται, καὶ πάντα πράγματα παρέχων τῷ σύζυγί τε καὶ ἠνιόχῳ ἀναγκάζει ἰέναι τε πρὸς τὰ παιδικὰ καὶ μνειῖαν ποιεῖσθαι τῆς τῶν ἀφροδισίων χάριτος. τῷ δὲ κατ' ἀρχὰς μὲν ἀντιτείνετον ἀγανακτοῦντε, ὡς [B]

<sup>43</sup> Text and translation according to the edition Loeb 1914, 494-9; translation by Fowler.

δεινὰ καὶ παράνομα ἀναγκαζομένω· τελευτῶντες δέ, ὅταν μῆδὲν ἢ πέρας κακοῦ, πορεύεσθον ἀγομένω, εἴξαντε καὶ ὁμολογήσαντε ποιήσιν τὸ κελευόμενον. καὶ πρὸς αὐτῷ τ' ἐγένοντο καὶ εἶδον τὴν ὄψιν τὴν τῶν παιδικῶν ἀστράπτουσαν. [35]. Ἰδόντος δὲ τοῦ ἡνίοχου ἡ μνήμη πρὸς τὴν τοῦ κάλλους φύσιν ἠνέχθη, καὶ πάλιν εἶδεν αὐτὴν μετὰ σωφροσύνης ἐν ἀγνῶ βάρθρῳ βεβῶσαν· ἰδοῦσα δὲ ἔδεισέ τε καὶ σεφθεῖσα ἀνέπεσεν ὑπτία, καὶ ἅμα ἠναγκάσθη εἰς τοῦπίσω ἐλκύσαι τὰς [C] ἡνίας οὕτω σφόδρα, ὥστ' ἐπὶ τὰ ἰσχία ἄμφω καθίσει τῷ ἵππῳ, τὸν μὲν ἐκόντα διὰ τὸ μὴ ἀντιτείνειν, τὸν δὲ ὑβριστὴν μάλ' ἄκοντα. ἀπελθόντε δὲ ἀπωτέρω, ὁ μὲν ὑπ' αἰσχύνης τε καὶ θάμβους ἰδρῶτι πᾶσαν ἔβρεξε τὴν ψυχὴν, ὁ δὲ λήξας τῆς ὀδύνης, ἦν ὑπὸ τοῦ χαλινοῦ τε ἔσχεν καὶ τοῦ πτώματος, μόγις ἐξαναπνεύσας ἐλοιδόρησεν ὀργῇ, πολλὰ κακίζων τὸν τε ἡνίοχον καὶ Διὸν ὁμόζυγα ὡς δειλία τε καὶ ἀνανδρία λιπόντε τὴν τάξιν καὶ ὁμολογίαν· καὶ πάλιν οὐκ ἐθέλοντας προσιέναι ἀναγκάζων μόγις συνεχώρησε δεομένων εἰσαῦθις ὑπερβαλέσθαι. ἐλθόντος δὲ τοῦ συντεθέντος χρόνου, ἀμνημονεῖν προσποιούμενῳ ἀναμνηστικῶν, βιαζόμενος, χρεμετίζων, ἔλκων ἠνάγκασεν αὐτὸν προσελθεῖν τοῖς παιδικοῖς ἐπὶ τοὺς αὐτοὺς λόγους, καὶ ἐπειδὴ ἐγγύς ἦσαν, ἐγκύψας καὶ ἐκτείνας τὴν κέρκον, ἐνδακὼν τὸν χαλινόν, Ἐμετ' ἀναιδείας ἔλκει· ὁ δ' ἡνίοχος ἔτι μᾶλλον ταῦτὸν πάθος παθὼν, ὥσπερ ἀπὸ ὑσπληγῶ ἀναπεσὼν, ἔτι μᾶλλον τοῦ ὑβριστοῦ ἵππου ἐκ τῶν ὀδόντων βία ὀπίσω σπᾶσας τὸν χαλινόν, τὴν τε κακίγορον γλῶτταν καὶ τὰς γνάθους καθήμαξεν καὶ τὰ σκέλη τε καὶ τὰ ἰσχία πρὸς τὴν γῆν ἐρείσας ὀδύνας ἔδωκεν. ὅταν δὲ ταῦτὸν πολλάκις πάσχων ὁ πονηρὸς τῆς ὕβρεως λήξῃ, ταπεινωθεὶς ἔπεται ἡδὴ τῇ τοῦ ἡνίοχου προνοίᾳ, καὶ ὅταν ἴδῃ τὸν καλόν, φόβῳ διόλλυται· ὥστε ξυμβαίνει τότ' ἡδὴ τὴν τοῦ ἔραστοῦ ψυχὴν τοῖς παιδικοῖς αἰδουμένην τε καὶ δεδιῦσαν ἔπεσθαι.

[34]. In the beginning of this tale I divided each soul into three parts, two of which had the form of horses, the third that of a charioteer. Let us retain this division. Now of the horses we say one is good and the other bad; but we did not define what the goodness of the one and the badness of the other was. That we must now do. The horse that stands at the right hand is upright and has clean limbs; he carries his neck high, has an aquiline nose, is white in colour, and has dark eyes; he is a friend of honour joined with temperance and modesty, and a follower of true glory; he needs no whip, but is guided only by the word of command and by reason. The other, however, is crooked, heavy, ill put together, his neck is short and thick, his nose flat, his colour dark, his eyes grey and bloodshot; he is the friend of insolence and pride, is shaggy-eared and deaf, hardly obedient to whip and spurs. Now when the charioteer beholds the love-inspiring vision, and his whole soul is warmed by the sight, and is full of the tickling and prickings of yearning, the horse that is obedient to the charioteer, constrained

then as always by modesty, controls himself and does not leap upon the beloved; but the other no longer heeds the pricks or the whip of the charioteer, but springs wildly forward, causing all possible trouble to his mate and to the charioteer, and forcing them to approach the beloved and propose the joys of love. And they at first pull back indignantly and will not be forced to do terrible and unlawful deeds; but finally, as the trouble has no end, they go forward with him, yielding and agreeing to do his bidding. And they come to the beloved and behold his radiant face. And as the charioteer looks upon him, his memory is borne back to the true nature of beauty, and he sees it standing with modesty upon a pedestal of chastity, and when he sees this he is afraid and falls backward in reverence, and in falling he is forced to pull the reins so violently backward as to bring both horses upon their haunches, the one quite willing, since he does not oppose him, but the unruly beast very unwilling. And as they go away, one horse in his shame and wonder wets all the soul with sweat, but the other, as soon as he is recovered from the pain of the bit and the fall, before he has fairly taken breath, breaks forth into angry reproaches, bitterly reviling his mate and the charioteer for their cowardice and lack of manhood in deserting their post and breaking their agreement; and again, in spite of their unwillingness, he urges them forward and hardly yields to their prayer that he postpone the matter to another time. Then when the time comes which they have agreed upon, they pretend that they have forgotten it, but he reminds them; struggling, and neighing, and pulling he forces them again with the same purpose to approach the beloved one, and when they are near him, he lowers his head, raises his tail, takes the bit in his teeth, and pulls shamelessly. The effect upon the charioteer is the same as before, but more pronounced; he falls back like a racer from the starting-rope, pulls the bit backward even more violently than before from the teeth of the unruly horse, covers his scurrilous tongue and jaws with blood, and forces his legs and haunches to the ground, causing him much pain. Now when the bad horse has gone through the same experience many times and has ceased from his unruliness, he is humbled and follows henceforth the wisdom of the charioteer, and when he sees the beautiful one, he is overwhelmed with fear; and so from that time on the soul of the lover follows the beloved in reverence and awe.

The story of Snāuuiōka, an Iranian demon in the figure of a child, is well known in the Iranian domain. According to *Yašt* 19.43-4, he intends to yoke the two main antagonistic 'spiritual' agents of Zoroastrianism as steeds: Spənta Mainiiu (the Incremental/Bounti-

ful Thought/Mindfulness)<sup>44</sup> and Anra Mainiiu (the Hostile Thought/Mindfulness).<sup>45</sup> Actually this demon threatens not only to yoke these primordial powers but also to use the sky (*asman-*) as the cart of his chariot and the earth (*zam-*) as its wheel. I have already discussed the cosmographic and uranographical implications of this image.<sup>46</sup> I recall that the intention of the demon is to disrupt the cosmic order, taking advantage of the hostility between the two cosmic agents he wants to yoke as horses.

This is the brief presentation of the myth according to *Yašt* 19.43-4:<sup>47</sup>

yō janaṭ snāuuiḍkəm	(Kərəsāspa), who killed Snāuuiḍka,
yim sruuō.zanəm asəṅgō.gāum	who (was) horned (and) with stony hands,
yō auuaθa viiāxmaniiata	who so declared:
apərənāiiu ahmi nōiṭ pərənāiiu	«I am an adolescent, not an adult.
yezi bauuāni pərənāiiu	If I could become an adult,
zəm caxrəm kərənauuāne	(then) I shall use the earth (as) a wheel,
asmanəm raθəm kərənauuāne.	I shall use the sky (as my) chariot.»
auuanaiieni sprəntəm mańiiium	«I will fetch down the Incremental Thought
haca raoxšna garō nmāna	from the bright <i>Garō Nmāna</i> (i.e. the paradise),
uspataiieni aṅrəm mańiiium	I will make the Evil Thought fly up
əṛəyata haca *daožan'ha	from the horrible Hell.
tē mē vāšəm θanjaiiāṅte	They both shall pull my wagon,
spəntasca mańiiuš aṅrasca	the Incremental and the Evil Thought
yezi məm nōiṭ janāṭ	if he does not kill me,
naire.manā kərəsāspō	manly-minded Kərəsāspa!»
təm *janaṭ naire.manā kərəsāspō	Him manly Kərəsāspa struck down,
auua apanəm gaiiehe	to the last of his life,
<fra>sānəm uštānahe	to the destruction of his life breath.

**44** On the concept of *mainiiu-*, see Panaino 2006a and 2012.

**45** About the primordial antagonism of these two Thoughts and the interpretation of their role, see Panaino 2004 with a large conspectus of the academic debate and on the pertinent bibliography. These two *mainiiu-*s, according to a Gāθic passage, *Yasna* 30.3a, have been perceived as 'two twin-(instances of) sleeping/dreaming' or simply 'thanks to, during a dream/sleep (instrum. sg.)'; see the discussion in Panaino 2015, 171-5, *passim*.

**46** Panaino 2019.

**47** Recent editions and/or translations of this text are: Hintze 1994a, 229-35; Hintze 1994b, 24; Humbach, Ichaporia 1991, 122; Pirart 1992, 60-3; 2010, 316; Lecoq 2016, 595-6.

The image of a pair of horses (white and black) fighting each other for the control of the waters of the Sea Vourukaša (in turn appearing in form of a mare) is one of the main motifs of the Avestan hymn to Sirius, the god Tištriia.<sup>48</sup> The main activity of this god is the liberation of the rain clouds imprisoned in the mythical Sea, located between heaven and earth. The narrative core of the *Tištār Yašt* constitutes one of the oldest examples of an ancient Iranian mythological cycle, and is the most detailed ancient eastern Iranian astral myth. According to the myth, the star Sirius assumes the form of a marvellous white stallion:

*Yašt* 8.18:<sup>49</sup> [...]

kəhrpəm raēθβuuaiieiti  
raōxšnušuuu vazəmnō  
aspəhe kəhrpa aurušahe  
srīrahe zairi.gaōšahe  
zaraniio.aiβiḍānahe [...].

“[...] Tištriia] mixes (his) shape  
flying among the lights (i.e. the heavenly stars)  
with the shape of a white horse,  
a beautiful one with yellow ears,  
having a golden bridle [...].

Yt. 8.20:<sup>50</sup> āaṭ paiti auuāiti

spitama zaraθuštra  
tištriio raēuuā xvarənanəṽā  
auui zraiiō vourukašaṃ  
aspəhe kəhrpa aurušahe  
srīrahe zairi.gaōšahe  
zaraniio.aiβiḍānahe

Then, he swoops down  
O Spitama Zaraθuštra  
the bright Tištriia beaming with glory  
towards the Sea Vourukaša  
in the shape of a white horse,  
a beautiful one with yellow ears,  
hawing a golden bridle.

Yt. 8.21:<sup>51</sup> ā dim paiti.yaš

daēuuō yō apaōšō  
aspəhe kəhrpa sāmahe  
kauruuəhe kauruuō.gaōšahe  
kauruuəhe kauruuō.barəšahe  
kauruuəhe kauruuō.dūmahe  
dayəhe aiβiḍātō.tarštōiš.

Against him there rushes out  
the demon Apaoša  
in the shape of a black horse,  
bald, bald-eared,  
bald, bald-maned,  
bald, bald-tailed,  
scabby, frighteningly harnessed.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Panaino 1990; 2009.

<sup>49</sup> Panaino 1990, 44, 111-12. The following stanzas of the *Tištār Yašt* are also collected in Martinez, de Vaan 2014, 108-11.

<sup>50</sup> Panaino 1990, 45-6.

<sup>51</sup> Panaino 1990, 47.

<sup>52</sup> In the analysis of aiβiḍāta.taršti-, I accept the consideration advanced by Swennen 2004, 81-3, 108, 376.



Yt. 8.22:<sup>53</sup> hām tāciṭ bāzuš baratō  
 spitama zaraθuštra  
 tištriiasca raēuuā xʿarənaŋvā  
 daēuuō yō apaōšō  
 tā yuiḍiiaθō spitama zaraθuštra  
 θri. aiiarəṃ θri. xšaparəṃ  
 ā dim bauuaiti aii. aojā  
 ā dim bauuaiti aiβi. vaniiā  
 daēuuō yō apaōšō  
 tištrīm raēuuantəm xʿarənaŋhuṇtəm.

The two (horses) ramp (up their) forelegs  
 O Spitama Zaraθuštra,  
 the bright Tištriia beaming with glory  
 and the demon Apaōša,  
 The two (horses) kick (each other), O Spitama Zaraθuštra,  
 for three days (and) three nights,  
 (but) he becomes superior to him,  
 he becomes winner over him,  
 the demon Apaōša  
 over the bright Tištriia beaming with glory.

Yt. 8.23:<sup>54</sup> apa dim aḍāt viieiti  
 zraiiiaŋhaṭ haca vourukašāt  
 hāθrō. masəŋhəm aḍβanəm.  
 sāḍrəṃ uruuīstrəmca nimirūte  
 tištriio raēuuā xʿarənaŋvā  
 sāḍrəṃ mē ahura mazda  
 uruuīstrəm āpō uruuarāšca  
 baxtəm daēne māzdaiiesne.  
 nōiṭ maṃ nūraṃ mašiiāka  
 aōxtō. nāmana yasna yazəṇte  
 yaθa anii yazatāŋhō  
 aōxtō. nāmana yasna \*yazinti.

He drives him away from there,  
 from the Sea Vourukaša,  
 over a distance of the length of one hāθra.  
 «Defeat and retreat» walls  
 the bright Tištriia beaming with glory.  
 «Defeat to me! O Ahura Mazdā,  
 retreat, O waters and plants,  
 ill luck, O Mazdean Religion.  
 Men do no longer worship me now  
 with a sacrifice in which (my) name is uttered,  
 as other *yazatas* are worshipped  
 with a sacrifice in which (their) names are uttered!»

The god Tištriia fights for the control of the waters against his antagonist, the demon Apaōša. The antagonists are presented as two stallions violently fighting until Tištriia is beaten and repelled. Then, the god laments his defeat and declares that if the Iranian people had sacrificed to him he would have overcome the enemy (Yt. 8.24).<sup>55</sup> At this point, it is Ahura Mazdā who offers an empowering sacrifice<sup>56</sup> for the sake of Tištriia, so that the god-stallion can attack again. Stanzas 20-1 are repeated and finally the victory of the god is announced:

<sup>53</sup> Panaino 1990, 48, 114.

<sup>54</sup> Panaino 1990, 49, 114-15.

<sup>55</sup> Panaino 1990, 50, 115-16.

<sup>56</sup> See Panaino 1990, 51, 116; on this form of sacrifice, see Panaino 1986.

Yt. 8.28: <sup>57</sup> tā yuidiiaθō zaraθuštra	The two (horses) kick (each other), O Spitama Zaraθuštra,
ā rapiθβinām zruuānām	till the time of midday
ā dim bauuaiti aiβi.aojā	(but) he becomes superior to him,
ā dim bauuaiti aiβi.vaniiā	he becomes winner over him,
tištriio raēuuā x'arənar'ā	the bright Tištriia beaming with glory
daēuuō yō apaōšō.	over the demon Apaōša.

The Avestan text of *Yt.* 8.29-31<sup>58</sup> presents the triumph of Tištriia and exalts his success over the demon Apaōša, and the immersion of the horse within the waters of the sea, which he agitates and transforms into clouds distributing rainwaters over the Aryan lands.

A specific astral theme present in this hymn is that of the star Sirius (Tištriia), who in his quality of chief of the divine astral army fights against a horde of shooting stars (better "starred-worms [*stārō. kərəma-*]).<sup>59</sup> The myth emphasises a patent opposition between cosmic order (connected with the regular motion of the fixed stars) and demoniac disorder and famine (associated with the irregular and unpredictable motion of comets). Thus, if not of proper philosophical nature, this myth develops a strong cosmological theme, emphasising the defence of the order and of the cyclical harmony of the universe.

I do not claim that Iranian motifs *directly inspired* these Greek literary themes, but I think that some central ideas behind the images chosen by Aeschylus and Plato show a certain Iranian resonance, probably fruit of an oral circulation of Eastern myths, which has not been adequately considered. We can start by observing that in the *Persians* Xerxes, certainly a negative protagonist of the tragedy, assumed the role of the *auriga*. In this way, the Iranian mythological pattern in which a demon tries to yoke the two most prominent 'Spiritual Powers' in order to disrupt the cosmic order, was reversed: thus, the Persian king was presented as if he were the substitute of the demon Snāuuiδka, who, in fact, was defeated and killed by the hero Kərəsāspa before he could be able to realise his project. The image of the two antagonistic forces, like the two quarrelling women (virtually equated with two mares or horses yoked to the same chariot), who are also sisters belonging to a common stock (κασιγνήτα γένους τὰ τοῦ) and apparently so similarly good looking as to be imagined as twins, again evokes the pattern of the two Avestan Mainiius (doubtless 'twins' [*yəma-*]), whom the demon would like to harness. Here too we must observe an inversion of the positive/negative polarity, where

<sup>57</sup> Panaino 1990, 52, 117.

<sup>58</sup> Panaino 1990, 53-5, 117-19.

<sup>59</sup> Panaino 2006b.

once again the Persian lady plays the role of the obedient horse (in this case a metaphor for the 'slave'), while the Greek (Doric) woman here embodies the rebellious reaction of the wild horse, refusing to submit to the Persian power.

The comparative motifs are striking and the resonance seems to be significant. To this theme I would like to add another comparative element concerning the motif of the direct violent fight between the white horse and the black one. This duel became a sort of mythological icon, whose effects were probably perceived outside of the limits of the Iranian borders. We must note that the role of Sirius in the framework of the Mazdean mythology was well known not only to Plutarch but perhaps also to Theopompus of Chios (*FGrHist* 115 F 65),<sup>60</sup> whose textual material was explicitly quoted and embedded within the *De Iside et Osiride* 46-7<sup>61</sup> composed by the Greek moralist. It is then not farfetched to suppose an oral diffusion of this cycle firstly among the Eastern Greeks and later among their continental brothers. I recall that Plato grew up in the family of his stepfather, Pyrilampes, who was the Persian πρόξενος,<sup>62</sup> so that his familiar ambience was strongly exposed to a direct acquaintance with Iranian traditions. We must consider that Tištriia (the star Sirius) as a white horse ramping against the demon Apaōša must have been imagined as a 'flying horse', perhaps even winged.<sup>63</sup> The archaic juxtaposition of birds and horses in connection with the divine chariots of the Vedic poets, studied by Swennen,<sup>64</sup> is pertinent to this topic, too.

All these data show that the Iranian folklore and its mythology offered a number of stories of strong imaginary impact, which presumably circulated in the eastern Mediterranean area thanks to oral exchanges since the earliest Achaemenid times or even earlier. In particular, the strong symbolical antagonism between the white

<sup>60</sup> About the use of Theopompus' sources, see de Jong 1997, 200-2, 253, 313, 319, *passim*; cf. also Clemen 1920b, 155-70.

<sup>61</sup> See Clemen 1920a, 48-9; Sherwood Fox, Pemberton 1927, 51-3; Vasunia 2007, 44-5; de Jong 1997, 158-204; for the critical text of the *De Iside et Osiride*, 46-7, see the new *editio teubneriana* by Nachstädt, Sieveking, Titchener quoted as Plutarchus 1971. The reference to Sirius occurs before Plutarch mentions Theopompus, so that we cannot absolutely affirm that this part was directly derived from a lost work of Theopompus, but the origin must be equally older, although we must maintain a certain caution on the issue.

<sup>62</sup> See the considerations by Platthy (1990, 26-32) about Pyrilampes, the second husband of Perictione, Plato's mother. Zaccharini fittingly reminds me the fondness of Pyrilampes' son for horses, mentioned in Platon's *Parmenides* 126c. Certainly, it is a minor element, but it could be pertinent in the framework of the present investigation.

<sup>63</sup> Tištriia is never defined as 'winged' in an explicit way, but in many places the Avestan texts states that he flies.

<sup>64</sup> Swennen 2004, 71-80.

and the black horse,<sup>65</sup> champions respectively of order and disorder, like the two primordial Mainiius, whom the young demon Snāuuiδka would try to yoke to his chariot, offered a suggestive image for further inspirations. We can reasonably assume that the image of a horse defined as καλός τε καὶ ἀγαθός (see also Plat. *Phaedr.* 253d τῶν δὲ δὴ ἵππων ὁ μὲν, φαρμέν, ἀγαθός, ὁ δ' οὐ) a symbol of a rational principle, moving up toward the divine realm, and contrasting the downward motion of the other stallion (246b ὁ δὲ ἐξ ἐναντίων τε καὶ ἐναντίος), descending into the material world, was impressive and perhaps philosophically suggestive. But it would be preposterous to affirm that we have to do with a philosophical transformation of the myth of the two Mazdean Mainiius, imagined as two opposite steeds yoked to a heavenly chariot, or again as a direct adaptation of the story of the two horses, the antagonists of the seasonal myth of the liberation of the water. In this case, I would like to emphasise the similarity of the patterns, which, *mutatis mutandis*, should occupy at least a place within the catalogue of Graeco-Iranian intercultural themes. Thus, in the framework of a cautious formulation I would simply like to call attention to the relevance of these Eastern mythopoeic motifs, whose wider circulation we may reasonably presume, and which might have become part of larger Eastern-Mediterranean literary (oral) lore.

If we cannot state (but equally there is no reason to deny this possibility a priori) that Aeschylus and Plato consciously had access to a foreign repertory, there is no reason to exclude that these Mazdean traditions might produce a certain echo, so that scattered hints of them were at hand as a fascinating – although ‘Barbarian’ – narrative heritage, at the disposal at least of some more curious Greek intellectuals. For instance, the motif of the fight between the white (*auruša-*) and the black (*sāma-*) horse is common (λευκός *versus* μέλαγχρως) as well as the physical description of the two rival horses in order to represent beauty and goodness on the one hand and ugliness and terror on the other.

Another interesting point to be considered is the one recently underlined by Samra Azarnouche.<sup>66</sup> In the Iranian world, the only animal race without a direct antagonist in another zoological competitor (dog *versus* wolf, for instance) is the horse. Only in this case, we find an inner antagonism, i.e., between the white and the black horse, but – and this is a most important fact – Anra Mainiiu himself can assume the visible shape of a horse.<sup>67</sup> The attribution of an inner du-

<sup>65</sup> On the black and white horses in Antiquity and Mediaeval time, see Anonymous 2004.

<sup>66</sup> See Azarnouche in press.

<sup>67</sup> This possibility is evident not only in the Avestan passage above quoted, but also in the *Šāhnāme*, in the episode of Kay Khosrow and Behzād, on which see again the article by Azarnouche in press.

alism to this animal emphasises the role of the horse, marks its difference as an animal which can embody the two highest spiritual forces of the universe, and in which the worst demon can manifest his power. All these elements invite us to appreciate this emphasis as a factor of cultural irradiation that might have played a certain influence. Certainly, the idea that the horse was the animal closest to the human being from the point of view of a representation of the individual conscience is remarkable, as we will see again in the conclusions of this study.

Both Aeschylus and Plato had many reasons to observe the Persian world, and it is improbable that in a way or another they did not try to study and to collect material on the culture of this prominent enemy. Furthermore, we must wonder if Plato, who surely knew Aeschylus' *Persae*, might have been equally inspired in his adoption of the theme of the antagonist pair of horses. This line of investigation is underpinned also by the observation that if we try to enlarge our comparative observation on the *universal conspectus* of the ancient mythological motives belonging to the first half of the first millennium BCE, we can find only few pertinent examples of stories concerning the association of astral bodies or luminaries with horses, or the identification of horsemen with some celestial bodies, but a strongly dualistic representation of opposite cosmic principles as two rival stallions or the story of the demon Σνάουιδκα's attempt at harnessing two antagonist spiritual beings (but yoked in the same way of two horses) to the same chariot (similarly Xerxes' maidens in Aeschylus), is isolated with the exception of a pattern concerning the general theme of the 'Horses-brothers'. In this case,

an antagonist possesses a horse which can overtake any other. The Hero obtains the brother (or sister) of this horse who is the only one to win the race with the antagonist's horse.<sup>68</sup>

But this pattern does not strictly belong to a dualistic framework, in which cosmological and ethical principles are directly involved.

<sup>68</sup> See Thuillard et al. 2018.

## 2 An Iranian Additional Correspondence for the Second Omen Seen by Queen Atossa?

Until now in this study, I have mainly discussed the dream of Atossa. But her nocturnal vision was more complex. The queen, in fact, had another terrible *omen*,<sup>69</sup> whose symbolic and metaphoric complexity presents some aspects, which, despite many discussions,<sup>70</sup> can yield yet more secrets. We start with the text of the *Persai*, 201-14:<sup>71</sup>

ἐπεὶ δ' ἀνέστην καὶ χεροῖν καλλιρροῦ  
 ἔψαυσα πηγῆς, σὺν θυηπόλῳ χερὶ  
 βωμὸν προσέστην, ἀποτρόποισι δαίμοσιν  
 θέλουσα θῦσαι πελανόν, ὧν τέλη τάδε.  
 ὄρῳ δὲ φεύγοντ' αἰετὸν πρὸς ἐσχάραν 205  
 Φοῖβου· φόβῳ δ' ἄφθογγος ἐστάθην, φίλοι·  
 μεθύστερον δὲ κίρκον εἴσορῶ δρόμῳ  
 πετροῖς ἐφορμαίνοντα καὶ χηλαῖς κάρα  
 τίλλονθ'. ὁ δ' οὐδὲν ἄλλο γ' ἢ πτήξας δέμας  
 παρεῖχε. ταῦτ' ἐμοὶ τε δείματ' εἰσιδεῖν 210  
 ὑμῖν τ' ἀκούειν. εὖ γὰρ ἴστε, παῖς ἐμὸς  
 πράξας μὲν εὖ θαυμαστὸς ἂν γένοιτ' ἀνὴρ·  
 κακῶς δὲ πράξας — οὐχ ὑπεύθυνος πόλει,  
 σωθεὶς δ' ὁμοίως τῆσδε κοιρανεῖ χθονός.

When I had risen and washed my hands  
 in a fair-flowing spring, I approached  
 the altar with offerings in my hand,  
 wishing to pour a rich libation to the deities who avert evil,  
 for whom such rites are appropriate.  
 Then I saw an eagle fleeing for refuge to the altar  
 of Phoebus—and I was rooted speechless to the spot with terror,  
 [my friends.  
 Next I saw a hawk swooping on him at full speed with beating  
 [wings,  
 and tearing at his head with its talons—  
 and he simply cowered and submitted.

**69** As Enrico Medda rightly observes (private communication), the vision of the falcon was not properly framed within a dream, because the bird was seen after the queen wake up and was going to perform her ritual duties to the gods in order to remove the bad omens. In any case, the two visions (the first in a dream, the second in a state of wakefulness) are perfectly complementary.

**70** See again Walde 2001, 81-2, *passim*.

**71** For the Greek text, see West 1991, 12-13; see also the Loeb edition and translation by Sommerstein 2008, 34-7. Cf. also the French edition by Mazon (Aeschylus 1969, 69-70). See now Garvie 2009, 11; 122-8.

This was terrifying for me to behold, and must be terrifying for you to hear; for you know well that if my son were successful he would be a very much admired man, but were he to fail—well, he is not accountable to the community, and if he comes home safe he remains ruler of this land.

The motif of a hawk or a falcon (κίρκος)<sup>72</sup> attacking an eagle, which was fleeing away in search of divine protection, is strikingly allegorical. Like the Persian eagle – the royal bird of the heaven, the king of the birds – trembles in front of a little hawk/falcon, who can even tear his head with its talons, so a little Greek army is ready to defeat the enormous *hainā*- of the Persians. But this image can find further explanations in the light of the Old Persian *regalia*.

The Aryan Glory, the *x<sup>v</sup>arənah-*, a very complex ideological and religious symbol,<sup>73</sup> was associated with a bird of prey, *vārəyṇa-* (m.),<sup>74</sup> whose form the *x<sup>v</sup>arənah-* assumes when leaving Yima (*Yt.* 19.34-5),<sup>75</sup> although its ornithological identification is uncertain. Charpentier<sup>76</sup> and Lommel<sup>77</sup> considered it an 'eagle', but Hassuri<sup>78</sup> suggested it was a 'Corvus Corax', following Darmesteter,<sup>79</sup> who suggested it was a 'ra-

<sup>72</sup> Garvie (2009, 102) remarks that "(the κίρκος was a species of the generic ἰέραξ (Arist. *HA* 620<sup>a</sup>17-18), but the two terms could be used synonymously".

<sup>73</sup> For a very large and detailed overview dedicated to the subject of the *x<sup>v</sup>arənah-*, see Gnoli 1999. On this subject, see some original and very pertinent remarks introduced by Tuplin (2021).

<sup>74</sup> Bartholomae 1904, 1411, does not identify the bird with precision. We must observe that probably we have also an older radical stem *vārəjan-*, as suggested by Kellens (1974, 318-20). The etymology of this compound is controversial: Benveniste (in Benveniste, Renou 1934, 34) tentatively suggested that the first element *vārə<sup>o</sup>/vārəm<sup>o</sup>* as 'defence'. Thus, the compound would mean 'the one who breaks the defence'. Another solution was advanced by Humbach (1957, 299; 1974, 193), who explained *vārəjan-/vārəyn-* (< *\*vārəjən-* through a dissimilation). The German scholar identified in the first element a form corresponding to Gr. ἀρήν and Ved. *úran-* 'sheep', which is from PIE *\*uṛH<sub>2</sub>en-*. Thus, the meaning of the whole compound would be 'Lämmer-schläger'. Humbach accepted the ornithological association with a 'Falke'. Kellens (1974, 318-20) prudently preferred Benveniste's solution also in force of the problem presented by the length of the first vowel in *vārə<sup>o</sup>*. For the orthography of the first part of the compound, see also de Vaan 2003, 183.

<sup>75</sup> Hintze 1994, 191-9; Humbach, Ichaporia 1998, 111-13; Pirart 1992, 48-9; Lecoq 2016, 592.

<sup>76</sup> Charpentier 1911, 59-60.

<sup>77</sup> Lommel 1927, 179-81.

<sup>78</sup> Hassuri 1981. The astrological argument adduced in order to associate the *vārəyṇa*-bird with the 'raven' of the eighth sign of the Zodiac introduced by Hassuri is inconsistent, because we have not piece of information concerning the fact that during the redaction of the earliest Avestan hymns, the Avestan people knew the division of the Babylonian Zodiac and associated *Vərəθrayna* with the planet Mars.

<sup>79</sup> Darmesteter 1892, 2: 566, associated it with Pahl. *warāy* 'crow' or *kulāy*.

ven' or a 'crow'. Certainly, it was a big bird,<sup>80</sup> different from *saēna-*, m., normally understood as 'eagle'.<sup>81</sup> Thanks to the identification of Sogdian *w'ryn'y* [*wāraynay*] and its variants, all from *\*vārayna-ka-*, 'hawk' (as well shown by Benveniste<sup>82</sup> and MacKenzie),<sup>83</sup> and of Choresmian *w'ryn'nyk*, meaning 'royal falcon',<sup>84</sup> we can hypothetically admit that even the YAv. *vārəyna-* was a sort of 'falcon'. Furthermore, Stricker<sup>85</sup> and Shahbazi<sup>86</sup> have argued for the identification of the Avestan bird with the royal falcon on the basis of later sources, although the direct dependence of this Avestan symbolism on Egypt, as suggested by Stricker, seems to me difficult to prove. If the Eastern Iranian tradition seems to emphasise the magic protective power of the royal falcon,<sup>87</sup> although the earlier association with this animal is based only on later linguistic data besides, (the etymology of *vārəyna-* points to a meaning such as 'breaking the resistance' or 'lambs-killer',<sup>88</sup> which is perfect also for an eagle),<sup>89</sup> we have some evidence showing that in Western Iran the eagle maintained its prominent position in the iconographic language of kingship and that the eagle preserved its connection with the Royal Glory.

Harmatta<sup>90</sup> called attention to the archaeological discovery of a remarkable treasury unearthed in Armenia at Erebuni (close to Yerevan), probably belonging to a very high satrapal authority. Among the most relevant findings there is a very remarkable rhyton with a

<sup>80</sup> See Stricker 1964; Grenet 1984; Harmatta 1979; 1981, 203-4; Shahbazi 1984.

<sup>81</sup> Bartholomae 1904, 1548; this bird is the one which became the mythical *sēnmorw*, i.e. the *saēna- mərəya-*, or 'the *saēna-* bird'. See Schmidt 1980.

<sup>82</sup> Benveniste 1925, 19-20.

<sup>83</sup> MacKenzie 1970, 20-1, 73.

<sup>84</sup> Benzing 1983, sub voce *w'ryn'nyk* 'Königsfalke'; Benzing 1968, 47. Cf. Shahbazi 1984, 315.

<sup>85</sup> Stricker 1964.

<sup>86</sup> Shahbazi (1984) insisted on the Kūšān iconography of the Iranian god Vərəθraϋna, clearly associated with the *vārəyna-* bird in *Yašt* 14.19 (Charpentier 1911, 31; Lecoq 2016, 531), which is portrayed as wearing the emblem of his bird on his own headdress, doubtless a falcon with his long wings.

<sup>87</sup> This evidence does not mean that the eagle was considered inferior or that the 'Aryan Glory' was not connected even with this bird. Our evidence is scanty, but the subsequent development of the cycle of the *sēnmorw*, shows that the image of the eagle assumed a relevant meaning in the Iranian mythology and folklore.

<sup>88</sup> This depends on the interpretation we prefer: the one suggested by Benveniste or the one by Humbach (cf. here fn. 74). The interpretation of the Choresmian word, as given by the Arabic interpreters, did not exclude the meaning 'eagle' together with that of 'falcon'; see Benzing 1968, 47 [56.5].

<sup>89</sup> In the case of many iconographies, scholars are hesitant between the identification of the bird as an eagle or a falcon; cf. Shenkar 2014, 70, 134, 164.

<sup>90</sup> See Harmatta 1979.



horseman's protome (ca 5th c.). Harmatta<sup>91</sup> emphasised the fact that the cap of the satrap engraved on the rhyton was "decorated with two eagle-griffons, with one on both sides. The eagle-griffons are represented with a scaly body and with outspread wings and are facing one another". Furthermore, Harmatta<sup>92</sup> observed with reference to the Persian royal iconography:

The eagle-griffon with outspread wings was the royal emblem of the Achaemenian Great Kings at least since the end of the V<sup>th</sup> century B.C. We can quote the clear testimony of Xenophon for this fact. He relates in his *Anabasis* 1.10.12 καὶ τὸ βασιλεῖον σημεῖον ὄρα̃ν ἔφρασαν αἰετόν τινα χρυσοῦν ἐπὶ πέλιτῃ ἀνατεταμένον i.e. 'and they said that they have seen the royal emblem, some golden eagle with outspread wings (fixed) on shield'. Moreover, he confirms this description in his *Kyroupaideia* 7.1.4 in the following way: ἦν δὲ αὐτῷ [sc. Κύρω] τὸ σημεῖον αἰετὸς χρυσοῦς ἐπὶ δόρατος μακροῦ ἀνατεταμένους καὶ νῦν δ'ἔτι τοῦτο τὸ σημεῖον τῷ Περσῶν βασιλεῖ διαμένει i.e. 'his emblem (i.e. of Cyrus the Great) was a golden eagle with outspread wings (fixed) on a great lance. And this is even now the emblem of the Persian king.

Again Harmatta (1979, 306-7) remarked:

According to the description by Curtius Rufus, the coach of Darius III, the last Great King, was decorated with the images of his ancestors Ninus and Belus and 'between them they worshipped a golden eagle with outspread wings' (3.3.17 *utrumque currus (sc. regis) latus deorum simulacra ex auro argentoque expressa decorabant: distinguebant internitentes gemmae iugum, ex quo eminebant duo aurea simulacra cubitalia avorum, alterum Nini, alterum Beli. inter haec aquilam auream pennas extendenti similem sacraverant*).<sup>93</sup>

Harmatta rightly remarks that the adoption of this symbol seems to be confirmed in Achaemenian works of art, as shown, for instance, in a golden plate showing in its centre an eagle with open wings, and in his detailed study he shows that even in the framework of the decorative program still visible in the site of Nemrudh Dagh of Antiochus

<sup>91</sup> Harmatta 1979, 306.

<sup>92</sup> Harmatta 1979, 307.

<sup>93</sup> "Both sides of the chariot were adorned with images of the gods, embossed in gold and silver; the yoke was ornamented with sparkling gems, and on it rose two golden images a cubit high of the king's ancestors, one of Ninus, the other of Belus. Between these they had consecrated a golden eagle, represented with outstretched wings". Translation by Rolfe 1946, 85 (= Quintus Curtius 1946). Cf. Boyce 1982, 287.

I of Commagene, the presence of eagles-griffons is well documented in connection with the representation of the Persian ancestors of the Commagenian king. The Hungarian scholar also notes that this motif was again preserved on the coins of Tigranes II, and that it was reproduced again in Parthian and Sasanian royal iconography.<sup>94</sup>

The eagle was present in the Pre-Achaemenian mythological traditions. Anzu, the eagle living on the top of the mountains on a mythical tree of the god Enki, was a well-known literary and iconographic subject in Mesopotamian and then in Urartu. Harmatta actually assumed<sup>95</sup> an Urartean influx on the elaboration of the Achaemenian iconography, but also a strong impact of the Mesopotamian tradition on the development of an Indo-Iranian mythological cycle concerning the eagle. In fact, we know the Avestan myth of the bird *saēna-*, an 'eagle', which, according to *Yašt* 12.17,<sup>96</sup> sits on an extraordinary tree, located at the centre of the sea Vourukaša. But the tree of life was known also in the *Rgveda*, 1.164.20-2, where two eagles, alternatively eating from the fruits of the tree and ritually distributing the food of immortality, represent the regular succession between day and night. According to Harmatta<sup>97</sup> a far continuation of this most ancient mythological theme was echoed in the Proto-Bulgarian stone relief from Stara Zagora (Bulgaria), "which shows instead of the eagles another bird symbolising the royal power and splendour viz. two peacocks sitting on the tree of Life: one is eating the fruit of immortality, the other fasting looks at him". Harmatta collected other examples from Tajik and Persian folklore, and finally concluded that a circulation of the eagle-myth between the Mesopotamian and the Indo-Iranian world should be imagined, so that later on this motif entered also other cultures at various social levels.

It is not my intention to discuss here the possible Mesopotamian lineage of the Avestan and Vedic motif of the tree<sup>98</sup> with the bird(s) - in itself this hypothesis is not implausible and could be framed within a larger net of interconnections, but I would like to continue my discussion of the representation of the eagle as royal emblem of the Achaemenian power. Although we cannot establish when this symbol was adopted, i.e. if it was really current during the time of Cyrus the Great, the suspicion that it was already known during Darius and Xerxes' kingdoms may be safely assumed. If so, the vision of Atossa had a further meaning. The falcon attacking the eagle meant that another bird, although respected within the Iranian folklore, was

<sup>94</sup> See again Harmatta 1981, 203-4.

<sup>95</sup> Harmatta 1979, 315-16.

<sup>96</sup> Lecoq 2016, 474.

<sup>97</sup> Harmatta 1979, 317.

<sup>98</sup> See also Panaino 2018.

clutching its prey, and that this prey was not only a bird usually considered more powerful than a hawk or a falcon, but it was directly associated with the Persian power, exactly as in the case of the eagle.<sup>99</sup> Then, according to this line of interpretation, we have to do not only with a reversal of an expected event, i.e., one expects that it is the eagle that should attack the falcon, but with the humiliation of a bird that is the symbol of the Achaemenian royal glory (τὸ βασιλείου σημεῖον, according to Xenophon). Was the *xʷarənah-*, a category not frequently attested in Old Persian (although documented in the Old Persian onomastics under the Western form of *farnah-*),<sup>100</sup> associated with the eagle? Certainly, Greek data do not speak against a positive answer, although it is too difficult to establish a priori which kind of knowledge of the Iranian lore Aeschylus had. Actually if we can assume that a fitting association between Xerxes and the eagle is pertinent, it is impossible to forget that a direct link between royalty and the image of the royal eagle was deeply rooted in the Greek world with patent reference, for instance, to Pindar, *Pyth.* 1.7-9 (where the eagle sleeps on the sceptre of Zeus, as the king of birds) or Aristophanes, *Eq.* 1087 (where Paflagonian mentions an oracle according to which a sausage-seller shall become an eagle and reign over the whole world). As Medda suggests<sup>101</sup> to me we could take into consideration the hypothesis of a conflation involving themes of different origins, one traditionally Greek, the latter of Persian derivation. In any case, the symbolic language expressed by the *omen* seen by Atossa, but also by other passages, seems to reflect (at least in part) an Iranian background in a measure more relevant than usually assumed, and this evidence, if accepted, shows the poet's perspicacity of combining various traditions. Furthermore, we can imagine that some Iranian folklore elements were known, at least in a more or less simplified or superficial way, and we can easily admit that these Iranian models and patterns were received abroad, particularly within the Greek world. The enemy, in particular when prestigious and powerful, is a matter of inevitable interest.

In the framework of the present discussion, we should also keep in mind that the falcon was considered an incarnation of the Sun-God in Egypt,<sup>102</sup> and that Aeschylus could have played with a multi-cultural repertory. As Garvie<sup>103</sup> has emphasised, the notion that the eagle was associated with the image of the Persian royal family should be con-

**99** For the iconography of some sacred animals within the Mazdean tradition, see Compareti 2009-10. See now also Garvie 2009, 102-3, 134, 209-10, 233.

**100** Schmitt 2014, 175; cf. Mo'in 1964.

**101** I must thank again Enrico Medda for his kind advice.

**102** Stricker 1964, 312.

**103** See Garvie 2009, 102-3, 124.

sidered as certain, but he rightly insists on the connection between the hawk an Apollo,<sup>104</sup> which gave an additional meaning to the allegorical force of Atossa's vision.

In any case, these associations show the variety of intercultural references in ancient Greek literature, in particular when the authors targeted their most dangerous enemies.<sup>105</sup> Last but not least, some Greeks must have seen images of the Achaemenian winged disk,<sup>106</sup> which, as we know, was a much older icon, already current among Egyptians and Assyrians. The possibility that the winged-disk figure of Ahura Mazdā might be trivialised as representing a mythic bird, like a chimeric eagle, would not be slim, in particular if it was known that an eagle was the emblem of the royal family. At issue here is not on the appropriateness of the Greek interpretation, but the psychological impact of its result, right or wrong as it might be.

### 3 The Chariot of Agamemnon and the Image of the Barbarian King

I cannot avoid mentioning a striking visual implicit evocation of a covered Persian presence behind the dramatic presentation, offered by Aeschylus in his tragedy *Agamemnon*, of Agamemnon himself in front of his palace and his wife Clytemnestra. The victorious king, the noble destroyer of Troy, according to this version of the story, stands on his chariot (ἀπήνης;<sup>107</sup> v. 906), and his wife insists that he should descend from it without touching the ground, but placing his feet on the red purple robes<sup>108</sup> laid down by servants and handmaids (vv. 905-7 νῦν δέ μοι, φίλον κάρα, | ἔκβαιν' ἀπήνης τῆσδε, μὴ χαμαὶ τιθεῖς | τὸν σὸν πόδ', ὦναξ, Ἰλίου πορθήτορα 'then, please, dear heart, step out of this carriage — but do not set your foot on the earth, my lord, the

**104** It is also clear that in Atossa's dream Apollo did not give any help to the escaping eagle; see Garvie 2009, 125.

**105** In this context I must quote a very fitting additional observation advanced by Tuplin (2022). He notes that in the *Persians* the chorus (150-4) declares that the Persian queen is "a light equal to the light that comes from the eyes of the gods", and that this is primarily a light of salvation, but also a divine light. It is possible that these and other references, discussed by Tuplin, derive from a Greek reflection of Persian traditions, and that Hall (1999, 119) even considered as a "Greek appropriation of authentic Persian court language", although the real meaning of certain processes of apparent royal divinisation must be prudently considered; see again Tuplin 2017, 102.

**106** Cf. Shenkar 2014, 47-50, 62, with a discussion on some controversial interpretations. Cf. also Soudavar 2018, 107-8.

**107** This is a four-wheeled wagon, already known since Mycenaean times; cf. Beekes 2010, I, 116; cf. Medda 2017, 1: 157-8 fn. 383.

**108** On the interpretation 'robes' instead of 'carpets', see the specific discussion by Medda 2017, 1: 161-2.

foot that sacked Troy!').<sup>109</sup> He is rightly hesitant and in strong embarrassment, because he thinks that this is a kind of honour to be reserved to a god, not to a human being, but when his wife asks what would have then Priam done in his place (v. 935: τί δ' ἂν δοκεῖ σοι Πρίαμος, εἰ τὰδ' ἦνυσεν; 'What, do you think Priam would have done, if he had had a success like this?'), he is compelled to answer that the king of Troy would have certainly walked on those colourful robes (v. 936: ἐν ποικίλοις ἂν κάρτα μοι βῆναι δοκεῖ. 'I think he surely would have walked on brodered robes').<sup>110</sup>

The evocation of a 'Barbarian' (= Oriental) example in order to judge an honour worth of a god such as that offered to Agamemnon implicitly evokes a hidden simile with the supposed behaviour of a Persian king,<sup>111</sup> the only one historical person within the political space known by the Athenians, who could pretend such an impious divine treatment.<sup>112</sup> In the comparison between the compulsory descent of Xerxes from his chariot and in the invited descent of Agamemnon, soon destined to die, we can find another bad *omen*, which the poet evoked by means of an intertextual reference. In one case, the competitive disharmony of two women (corresponding to two horses) was fatal for the Persian king,<sup>113</sup> here the entry on a chariot accompanied by a Barbarian woman (Cassandra), presumably on the same or another chariot,<sup>114</sup> will result to be a mortal event for him, by the hands of another lady, his wife. The comparison of these motifs seems to me worth of further discussions. Certainly, it presents us a with a number of interesting elements, and puts on an ambiguous position the image of Agamemnon himself, but also it overturns the standard image of the Greek woman, who takes on demonic features compared to poor Cassandra, oriental but innocent. On the other hand, the revenge of Clytemnestra is taken against a king, who behaves as a Barbarian (= Persian) king, and thus finds its own justification in a moral system, which the final part of the *Oresteia* trilogy will eventually reset in a proper way.

**109** See the edition and translation by Sommerstein 2009, 104-5.

**110** Sommerstein 2009, 108-9.

**111** We must observe that the title of 'king', βασιλεύς, was used by Aeschylus only for Xerxes and Agamemnon; see Medda 2017, 3: 5-6.

**112** For a comparison between Agamemnon and Xerxes, see already Di Benedetto 1978, 157-8.

**113** See Medda 2017, 2: 151.

**114** On the debate concerning the presence of one or two chariots in this scene, see Medda 2017, 1: 157-60.

#### 4 Provisory Conclusions

After all these considerations, I cautiously suggest the following interpretation of the cited sources. The Iranian mythological background presented a certain number of attractive cosmological motifs involving horses, chariots and harnessing, whose diffusion can be reasonably postulated in an area larger than the Iranian borders. The Iranian myths contain two attractive motifs, namely chariot competition in a cosmological context which, moreover, features discordant horses in the same team. This is striking fact *per se*! It may be understood as due to simple chance or as involving conscious adoption. Furthermore, we can imagine that the stylised antagonism between a white and a black horse, which in Plato assumes a speculative meaning, started from the simple motif of battle between two steeds for a mare. In the Iranian myth this naturally observable phenomenon was poetically elaborated into a dualistic cosmic antagonism – a theme which, we may suppose, would have been a matter of interest for the likes of Plato. We must also observe that the Iranian myth of the star Sirius (Tištriia) was one of the most important ones within Mazdean cosmology and uranography. So, this theme was not just a very rare subject.

We may also suppose that Aeschylus' theme of antagonistic women/mares drew on, be it remotely, the Iranian demon attempting to harness the two antagonistic forces of the universe in form of two rival steeds. Of course, he would have adapted it to his dramatisation of the war with the Persian Empire. Xerxes could assume the role of the Iranian demon, while the role of the two mares would be reversed: so the obedient one (= the Persian lady) would become negative for her passive attitude, while the rebel mare would represent the Greek resistance against Persian imperialism.<sup>115</sup> The king's fall (v. 197 πίπτει δ' ἐμὸς παῖς) from the chariot<sup>116</sup> expressed the inevitable destiny of such a negative hero, like the death of the demon-trickster of the Iranian myth before he could disrupt the world (a motif politically translated into the Greek ethno-cultural space). Plato, who was well acquainted with the works by Aeschylus (and Parmenides) and perhaps open to stimulating foreign cultural suggestions, moved in his own direction, transforming a cosmic motif of mythological nature into a superb philosophical theme. The pattern of the two hostile 'Spirits' figured as two horses was part of a complex doctrinal elaboration of the struggle between order and disorder in nature: this antagonism becomes manifest even in the heavens throughout the battle between Tištriia and Apaōša, the white and the black horse. The allegorical

<sup>115</sup> See already Anderson 1972, 168.

<sup>116</sup> See Garvie 2009, 120-1.

use of the motif by way of its philosophical transformation was only a merit of Plato, as it is the complexity of the dialectics among the different parts of the soul, and the subtle relation between the idea of rationality and that of instinctual drive, which the charioteer must govern. On this profound elaboration no Iranian influence can be, of course, claimed, and I insist on this in order to avoid a misunderstanding of my view. But the interplay of a wider intercultural framework, if assumed on the background, would simply enlarge our comprehension of Plato's universalism and open-mindedness vis-à-vis external suggestions, without any supposed 'offence' to the greatness of the Greek philosophical thought. The evaluation of the potential role played by some external mythological motifs would simply enlarge the Greek repertory, so that certain resonances would be ascribable to oral circulation, which, although *inter tela volantia*, did not find impenetrable borders. In the case of the motif of the falcon attacking an eagle, the intercultural evaluation actually increases the meaning of the allegory, and emphasises the deepness of this insightful iconographic 'quotation' by the side of the Greek observers.

Note that the symbolic association between the soul and the horseman as well as that between the body and the horse are present in the later Pahlavi literature of the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>117</sup> In the third book of the *Dēnkard*, ch. 231,<sup>118</sup> and ch. 296,<sup>119</sup> we find relevant statements. According to § 231 "the body is given to the soul as a means as the horse (is given) to an horseman as a (his) mount" (*tan ō ruwān abzār ēdōn dād estēd čiyōn asp ō aswār ud bārag* [M258]), while § 296 concludes its remarks declaring that the quality of human essence (*xwadīh*) is foundational for the final success or failure of man, and that without wisdom (*xrad*) and other qualities one looks like "a bad horseman, whom his antagonist, on his horse, strikes deadly" (*čiyōn wadaq aswār kē-š hamēmāl pad xwēš asp ō oš kešēd* [M234]). This simile seems to present a far resonance of the Platonic tradition. Did the motif of horse riding in connection with the inner human qualities have an impact on the Iranian Mazdean tradition? Whether these later attestations contain an indirect reflexion of the Platonic philosophy in Sasanian Persia or not, it is difficult to say, because the comparison would be too general. Theoretically, we could also wonder if this motif was primordial, so that it would be considered even earlier than the Platonic simile. Presently, we cannot exclude the possibility that these images were travelling between the Mediterranean area and the East, in both directions, according to a normal condi-

<sup>117</sup> It is a merit of Samra Azarnouche to have underlined the importance of these passages.

<sup>118</sup> See de Menasce 1973, 244.

<sup>119</sup> See de Menasce 1973, 291.

tion distinguishing the history of the cultural relation between Iran and the West.

In a few words, any discussion about the transfer of motives and ideas, in particular when this subject involves so prestigious literary and philosophical authors, inevitably risks to open old polemics (*West und Ost oder West gegen Ost?*), as if one was attacking the prestige of the Greek thought in the name of the Oriental culture. In this study, I have simply collected very many arguments supporting the conclusion that Aeschylus and Plato were inevitably exposed to Iranian ideas, images, myths, motives, etc. In that framework, the symbolic role attributed to the antagonist horses inevitably evokes and reflects a strikingly Iranian original (earlier) tradition. The way in which these images travelled were many, and their diffusion was partly open, and thus it could have been consciously received, while in other cases it was spread as the result of a sort of underground expansion, due to the normal irradiation of external influences among cultures in contact. What I suggest here is that the background of these motives had very strong and patent Iranian roots, whose origin might have been evident also for these thinkers, at least in a generic sense, although we cannot presume as necessary a detailed knowledge of their original functions. The use Aeschylus and Plato did of these symbolic images was the fruit of their original interpretation, a foundational step which nobody could (and would) deny, despite the ultimate inspiration of these motives, whose Iranian origin deserves to be carefully considered.



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