THE words Myth and Ritual taken by themselves include practically the whole of the activities that we call religious; but in the decade before the second World War there came into prominence a school of interpreters of ancient religious belief which gave to the phrase Myth and Ritual a particular significance, namely, the existence in all early religious symbolism of a divine kingship, a sacred marriage, a combat between the king and the forces of evil, a death and resurrection of the divine king and a typifying by his myth of the death and rebirth of the seasons and crops. A predominant element in all religious myth is thus seen to be the securing by ritual of the means of subsistence, the regular cycle of the seasons and the return of life to the dead earth. This theory obviously owes much to the material collected by Sir James Frazer, and particularly to Adonis, Attis, Osiris, published in 1906; and of course it also owes much to the work of people like Jane Harrison and Gilbert Murray who in books such as Prolegomena (1903) and Five Stages of Greek Religion (1912) examined early religious beliefs with the theory in their minds that in most myths could be detected a “year δαιμων”, and, as some now think, overstated their case. The work of scholars such as Cumont, Wendland and Reitzenstein in showing the affinity of Christianity to the saviour religions of the Near East must also have created an expectancy of finding these elements universally.

The popularization of the “Myth and Ritual” theory of religious interpretation is, however, due in the main to the work of S. H. Hooke and his followers who were particularly anxious

1 This work, originally delivered as lectures in 1912, first appeared as Four Stages of Greek Religion.

2 See, for example, Cumont, Les Religions Orientales dans l'Empire Romain (Paris, 1906); P. Wendland, Hellenistisch-Römische Kultur (Tübingen, 1912); Reitzenstein, Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen (Leipzig, 1910); Dieterich, Eine Mithrasliturgie (Leipzig, 1903).
to save Christianity for themselves by showing that its central doctrines were fundamental to a good deal of existing religious belief and that its historical claims could be accepted as a unique example of the heightening and tension integral to all religions.¹

In two volumes of essays, *Myth and Ritual*, published in 1933, and *The Labyrinth*, published in 1935, the “Myth and Ritual” theory is applied, first to the religions of Egypt, Babylon and Palestine and then to the later religious developments of the Near East, and an attempt is made, with only partial success, to show its profound influence on the history of civilization.

The purpose of this essay is to examine what evidence, if any, is provided by the literature and beliefs of early Greece for the myth of a sacral kingship, a ritual combat, a sacred marriage and a ritual death and rebirth. In all hitherto-published works on Myth and Ritual Greek myth is either treated superficially ² or interpreted with absurd eccentricity as in Lord Raglan’s book *The Hero* (London, 1936), the whimsical interpretations in which were largely responsible for my own essay, since I had to dispel for myself the mental fog in which the book left me; but of this more later.

Professor Hooke and his school see, or saw, in religious texts the myth which accompanied the ritual enactment of the sacred combat and marriage, and some of his disciples see in what appear to be manifestly secular poems and songs nothing more than a spoken myth which accompanied a ritual. The curious thing is that although many scholars gave general assent to this theory, they have almost with one voice found its particular application unsatisfactory. Professor Brandon has dealt effectively with the theory as applied to Egypt,³ Professor Fish sees no justification

¹ I leave undiscussed the question whether, even had they established their thesis, Professor Hooke and his school could be said to have enhanced the claims of Christianity.

² See, for example, E. O. James’s *Myth and Ritual in the Ancient Near East* (London, 1958), which says nothing of the Athenian archon basileus, nothing of the pharmakos or scapegoat and of many other elements.

³ In a further symposium entitled *Myth, Ritual and Kingship* (1958), pp. 261 ff. It must be noted that in this symposium Professor Hooke reaffirms the claims of the Myth and Ritual school, though other contributors are guarded in their adherence to it, while at the same time reaffirming its great influence on religious thought.
whatsoever for applying it to Babylonian religious texts, and these two religions were originally the principal witnesses for the theory. As we shall see, the close examination of the Greek evidence also raises grave doubts. In fact, the Myth and Ritual School could now almost be said to be in decline, were it not that new books have appeared in which the original scope of the term Myth and Ritual has been widened to include practically all ritual *mimesis*, and its origins have been traced back to Palaeolithic cave art; and incidentally the originally sharp outlines of the theory have been blurred, until what we now see is a series of disquisitions with much material but few conclusions, on some common elements of primitive religious belief. Notable here are the works of Professor E. O. James, of which the most recent are *Myth and Ritual in the Ancient Near East* (1958) and *The Ancient Gods* (1960). Before narrowing our attention to the specifically Greek evidence it is relevant to see briefly on what lines the investigation has run in other religions.

In the widest sense all art is *mimesis*, imitation; when one makes toy soldiers a Greek would say that he "imitated soldiers with tin"; so that Homer and Virgil and Ovid and Shakespeare are practising *mimesis*, and it becomes easier to maintain that their writings are particular examples of the myth that accompanies a ritual. This is really a false aetiology: all art is *mimesis*, but not of the special kind which the "Myth and Ritual" school need to support their theory.

Professor James takes us back to the caves of Lascaux, Altamira and Les Trois-Frères, and sees in the wonderful cave-paintings of the Old Stone Age the foreshadowing of the ritual themes of later times; the ritual control of the chase, increase rites, the mimetic sacred dance, the funerary ritual, the vegetation cultus. It is true that much cave art from all over the world seems to have significant features in common: the representations of the hunt, with the actual killing of the animal, the lifelike drawings of the animals themselves, the scenes of war and sex and

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1 Professor Fish expressed his views in a paper read to a seminar in the University of Manchester some years ago.
2 I owe this idea to a brilliant essay by Gilbert Murray on *Poesis and Mimesis*, reprinted in his *Essays and Addresses* (London, 1921), pp. 107-24.
death; the strange way in which these drawings were reproduced in the inmost recesses of caves, sometimes as much as half a mile from daylight, which suggests that they were part of a secret cult, particularly as some of them appear near to ledges and tunnels quite out of reach of the floor, and only accessible by devious passages; and the equally strange way in which some pictures are a kind of palimpsest, with two or three figures superimposed when there is plenty of available wall space, as if one particular spot had a special importance. Recent investigations in North Africa, East Africa, South Africa and India have shown how many of these features are common to all cave art. The witch-doctor or sorcerer—the man disguised as an animal—is also found in many places, a most pronounced and suggestive example of mimesis, and even the styles are consistent: there is, for example, a kind of drawing which reduces men and animals to elongated sticks, and this is found in Europe, Africa and India.¹

The theory is that the chase, the marriage, the killing, the birth, were all enacted in mime before the actual incident took place, a ritual seen so commonly in rites for fertility, rain-increase and the like and which forms a part of so many children’s games. This theory has been abundantly argued and demonstrated, but already in the Palaeolithic period we are confronted with mysteries which we cannot wholly explain, and this sense of bafflement will, or should, persist when we are dealing with material which is relatively of yesterday, i.e. within the compass of recorded history. We cannot be sure that we know the purpose of any of the

cave-paintings, and although it is very naïve to assume that Stone Age man whiled away the long dark evenings by drawing bison and rhinoceros, it is humourless to see in every drawing evidence of a cult, so that a man throwing a spear is made to have a dim and esoteric significance. The trouble here as everywhere is that professors cannot help riding their theories to death.

Moving swiftly down the ages, the next cultures to occupy the attention of Professor James are the village settlements in Baluchistan and Iran which preceded the city-civilization of Mohenjo-daro and Harappā, and whose pottery has been so exhaustively discussed by Stuart Piggott, their dates being roughly in the end of the fourth millennium B.C. and the beginning of the third. Here there is insufficient evidence on which to base a theory. In the Zhob valley in particular in northern Baluchistan there have been found female figurines with holes for eyes and a generally terrifying appearance in spite of their small size of a few inches, and these, says Professor Piggott, were probably images of the dread goddess of death and rebirth—in fact one might say Persephone in her earliest known guise. Again, in the Kulli culture of southern Baluchistan we find, as in Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Egypt and elsewhere, figurines with exaggerated breasts and bodies, sometimes in association with objects thought to be phalli, and on occasion bearing traces of red paint, which was used on statues to enhance life-giving powers in Egypt, Mesopotamia and Malta. If, as is becoming a widespread belief, civilization as we know it originally sprang from Iran or near it, these village-cultures are of great importance for the primitive forms of religious belief and ceremony; but being prehistoric they cannot help us much. If every long and narrow stone that has been identified as a phallus were really a phallus, then every mountainside would give evidence of Priapean orgies.

When we reach the city-civilizations of Harappā and Mohenjo-daro, there seems at first sight much more evidence for a priest-kingship with its accompanying rites and ceremonies. These twin cities bore many points of resemblance to the cities of Sumeria and Egypt; in all three countries the dominant feature

of the landscape was a great river or rivers, which in all three countries irrigated an arid desert. The two great Indus cities are dominated by great citadels, where Marshall, Mackay, Wheeler and others have shown the great baths, the colleges of priests, the signs of serfdom of the masses and many other features denoting the absolute mastery of the priesthood. Unfortunately no one has deciphered the Indus script, although we have several thousand seals on which its four hundred or so characters are clearly stamped. Many of these scenes could plausibly be argued to show sacrifice of animals or even human beings at some ceremony, and we can see what seem to be traces of a scapegoat ritual; but there are several features of the Indus seals which defy explanation, as for instance the sacred brazier or manger which appears on so many of them, and here again the only possible attitude is one of qualified scepticism.

While still in India let us look for a moment at the Vedas and at Brahmanic ritual, since here at last our evidence is literary and we have texts to deal with. To what extent are the Vedic hymns texts to accompany a ritual? The obvious answer is, to a very great extent indeed, but of the myth we are looking for there is very little evidence among the Brahmins. Their myths were originally personifications of natural forces, the fire, the storm-cloud, the heavens, the lightning, the sun. There is an almost Milesian ring about some of the earlier Vedic speculations, as for example in Rig Veda, x. 129:

Nor Aught nor Naught existed, yon bright sky
Was not, nor heaven's broad roof outstretched above.
What covered all? What sheltered? What concealed?
Was it the water's fathomless abyss?

There was not death—yet was there naught immortal,
There was no confine betwixt day and night;
The only One breathed breathless by Itself,
Other than It there nothing since has been.

1 See R. E. M. Wheeler, The Indus Age (Cambridge, 1953), pp. 82 ff., and D. H. Gordon, op. cit. pp. 57-76. James, op. cit. pp. 106-7, has really very little to contribute on this point except to stress the importance attached to ritual bathing at Mohenjo-daro, and the frequent occurrence of figurines akin to those of Kulli and the Zhob valley.
Darkness there was, and all at first was veiled
In gloom profound—an ocean without light—
The germ that still lay covered in the husk
Burst forth, one nature, from the fervent heat.

Who knows the secret? Who proclaimed it here?
Whence, whence this manifold creation sprang?
The gods themselves came later into being—
Who knows from whence this great creation sprang?

He, from whom all this great creation came,
Whether His will created was or mute,
The Most High Seer that is in highest heaven,
He knows it—or perchance even He knows not.¹

The Brahmanic priesthood is probably a more or less faithful
reflection of the priesthood in the Indus cities, where the priest
was himself a kind of king and mediated with the gods on behalf
of the people. The Brahmans themselves always retained some­
thing of this mysterious power, and although for some time after
north-west India had succumbed to the Aryan invaders the king,
the warrior, kshatriya, took precedence over the priest, by the
time the Brahmanas, the prose commentaries on the Vedic hymns,
were composed, the Brahmans had re-established their supremacy
as the power behind the throne, since they had succeeded in
persuading the kings that nothing, not even the rising daily of the
sun, could take place without an elaborate and lengthy ritual, the
proper performance of which was possible only to the Brahmans
themselves. In the coronation ceremony of the ancient Indian
kings we find of course much symbolism: lustrations, sacrifices,
a token cattle-raid, a stepping in the direction of the cardinal
points, the throwing of dice and so on; and of course the king
is the patron and father of his people, responsible for moral as
well as social law. But much of this must have been a perfunctory
conformity with tradition, since it was the Brahmans themselves
who held all spiritual power and whose incantations made the
world go round. Again, the horse-sacrifice, by which a horse is
turned loose and the king claims all the ground covered by it, has
faint resemblances, in the actual turning-loose, to scapegoat-ritual,
but nothing more. Of the sacred marriage, of the death and

¹ Trans. Max Müller.
rebirth of the king-god and of the other central features of "myth and ritual" as it is professedly found elsewhere, there is not a trace. Nor are the Vedic hymns themselves at all like "myth and ritual" texts. Some of them much resemble, in length and even in sentiment, hymns in the Ancient and Modern collection. Finally, the whole tendency of Upanishadic interpretation of Vedic hymns was latent from the start in the hymns themselves. They imply a much more abstract and philosophical approach to the deity than that of sympathetic magic.

Turning now to the protreptic ritual of the Near East, the king was here represented as himself divine or given divine status as champion and representative of the people, though it is impossible to get a clear picture how in the myth the human king merges into the divine figure or the god descends to become the human king. The details vary in different cults and the texts themselves are of a varying state of completeness, coherence and intelligibility. The texts which we have are the words or story of the king-god or hero, recited periodically as an accompaniment to the ritual, which is held to be a re-enactment of the combat of the hero-king with the personified forces of darkness and evil, his death and resurrection.

It is important here to stress again that this is a theory imposed on the facts, not the facts themselves. Admittedly, like Lyell's geological theories and Darwin's Descent of Man, it has thrown much light on all kinds of obscure points; but, as we shall see, the thoroughgoing application of the theory has its dangers.

In early Egypt the general picture seemed fairly clear, though the texts are obscure and often fragmentary. Hooke listed the essential features of the annual festival which was observed to symbolize the death and rebirth of the year as follows:

1. The dramatic representation of the death and resurrection of the god.
2. The recitation or symbolic representation of the myth of creation.

1 "The Rigveda is much more than an adjunct to ritual. It might be called a literary anthology, drawn from family traditions. The religious expressions found in it are poetic exordia to the cult and are not designed as the direct accompaniment of ceremonies" (L. Renou, The Religions of Ancient India (London, 1953), p. 10).
2 S. H. Hooke, Myth and Ritual, p. 8.
(3) The ritual combat, in which the triumph of the god over his enemies was depicted.

(4) The sacred marriage.

(5) The triumphal procession, in which the king played the part of the god followed by a train of lesser gods or visiting deities.

All these elements are to be found in Egypt, where the earliest mythology bears in certain details a striking resemblance to that of Greece. We find the emergence of the sun-god from the primeval waters, the creation of the god of the atmosphere and the goddess of moisture, who in turn create the earth-god and the sky-goddess, and the emergence of their offspring, Osiris, Isis, Seth and Nephthys. Osiris weds Isis but is ousted from the throne of Egypt by Seth and killed; later he is miraculously brought to life and Isis bears him a son Horus, who in combat with Seth emasculates him just as Zeus emasculates his father Cronos. Some features of this story, notably the incestuous union of Osiris and Isis and the preoccupation with virility and its symbols, are of course common to a number of ancient myths. So far as can be discovered, Horus is identified in pre-dynastic Egypt with the reigning monarch of Heliopolis who is also the high priest of Osiris, and every year in the spring month of Khoiakh a most elaborate festival was held in which an effigy of Osiris was ritually buried in a funerary chamber and sprinkled with water, barley and sand, after which various weird and intricate ceremonies took place to symbolize the revivification of the god. This indeed seems a drastic over-simplification of the ceremony, which seems to be a mingling of reminiscences of two if not three festivals, and is found only in texts in which even the sequence of scenes is in dispute. In fact, a reading of the literature of the subject leaves one with a feeling of utter bewilderment that any sense whatever can be made out of the apparently nonsensical beliefs implied in the rites and ceremonies of early Egypt, and that we really understand little more about them than did Plutarch or Herodotus. So ardent an Egyptologist


as S. G. F. Brandon challenges the whole conception of Osiris as a yearly champion of good against evil or a yearly fighter on behalf of the crops. He draws attention to the striking fact that the Egyptian mind was directed towards death and the life after death and that its mythology was all oriented in this way. This involves the whole question of diffusion versus evolution as the explanation of the widespread occurrence of Myth and Ritual themes in the Near East. To the evolutionists who claim that at a given stage in the evolution of an agricultural community these beliefs are bound to occur, he quotes the example of ancient China, where in a community based on agriculture and with the same dependence on the seasons that we find in Egypt, there is no trace of a sacred marriage or of a dying god or of a ritual combat. If diffusion is the explanation, then it no longer seems clear, as it once did, that Egypt is the birthplace of these rites. Professor Blackman, for example, considered that the original myth and ritual pattern came, not from Egypt, but from Syria. Finally, Professor Brandon emphasizes that from earliest times Osiris was not primarily "a vegetation deity, with whose being the king was intimately associated and whose life-cycle constituted critical points in the course of the year; rather Osiris was the saviour to whom men and women turned for the assurance of immortality and before whom they believed that they would be judged in the next world.".

Babylonia provides us with another example of the kingly combat and the sacred marriage, and equal doubt attaches here too to the interpretation of the texts. There must have been a belief in prehistoric times that the king-god was responsible for the state of agricultural land and even for the regular recurrence of the seasons. The great festival was the New Year festival, at which the Creation Epic was twice recited, and the substance of the epic is Marduk's career and the annual triumph of order over Chaos. Marduk was a kind of year Δαίμων and is identified with

1 S. G. F. Brandon, "The Myth and Ritual Position Critically Considered" (Myth, Ritual and Kingship, pp. 265 ff.).
3 Myth and Ritual, p. 39.
4 Myth, Ritual and Kingship, pp. 276-7, where Professor Brandon in a note adduces evidence from vignettes in The Book of the Dead.
the various heavenly bodies during the course of the year, but a feature of the myth that is conspicuously lacking is the sacred marriage. "Babylonian myths had a similar cycle for all kinds of year-gods; that is why it can be argued that the Marduk myth as we know it was an adaptation of an earlier Enurta myth. Other gods had their New Year festivals, in which the ritual apparently resembled that of Babylon. It is to be presumed that the ritual of the bridal of Marduk and Sarpanitum was celebrated at the same time as a seasonal festival, the sacred marriage, elsewhere. Definite evidence that it was celebrated at the New Year festival is lacking, the best witness is the statement that implies a bridal after the festival." ¹

There is definite evidence for a sacred marriage, but it seems to have been connected with an autumn festival; but the Babylonian calendar is imperfectly known, and the whole body of evidence about the myth and ritual of that country is an incomprehensible jumble to which we lack a large number of the most important clues. Professor Smith in the article just quoted sums up his conclusions as follows: "What can legitimately be regarded as established is that the marriage rite was a state institution, that kings in practice could not, during some periods, neglect it, and that it belonged to a 'pattern', the sequence of festivals throughout a year." ² After some of the confident assertions previously made about myth and ritual in Babylonia, this is a very negative conclusion indeed.

The same caution prevails in the approach to the problem in the religion of the Hittites, in the Ras Shamra tablets and in the origins of Hebrew religion. O. R. Gurney and others see in the purulli festival at Nerik, with its ritual dragon-slaying, a weather-ritual very like that which can be surmised in Egypt and Babylon, but we cannot really be sure at what season the Hittite New Year began; and in any case the reconstruction and interpretation of parts of the Hittite texts is conjectural, while the texts themselves, particularly those relating to festival rituals, are fragmentary.³ The Ras Shamra tablets are even more conjectural

in meaning, and R. de Langhe enters the same caveat as do Messrs. Brandon, Smith, Gurney and others on excessive theorizing. Here, too, aesthetic considerations begin to creep in. De Langhe's sober scepticism of the theories of Gaster and Kapelrud is an excellent and most readable example of a sane and unbiased approach to a difficult text.

In the realm of Hebrew religion, once again the enthusiasm of Engnell and Mowinckel and Haldar and others is toned down very drastically by scholars such as H. H. Rowley, who perceive the value of the Myth and Ritual theory in establishing the importance and status of the Israelitic king and the existence of traces of cultic hymns in the Psalter, but who cannot detect a true Myth and Ritual pattern in the Old Testament.

We can now approach our Greek material knowing to some extent what we can expect. There should be a mass of evidence for the various constituents of the Myth and Ritual pattern—kingship, the sacred marriage, the combat with the forces of evil, the dying and rising of a god and so forth; this evidence should come from primitive strata of belief and should survive unexplained or drastically modified and occasionally uncritical application of the Myth and Ritual theory to writings which will not support that theory (this would happen, one supposes, in the mid-thirties, when the Myth and Ritual school was really getting under way); and we should expect to find that in spite of attempts to make all the evidence cohere in support of a theory, the facts simply will not fit in to the theory without jagged edges—there are either not enough pieces to complete the puzzle or there are some left over. And that is in fact what we do find.

In 1936 Lord Raglan published a book entitled *The Hero*, which surveyed Norse saga, English and Irish folklore, and Greek mythology in an attempt to prove that all were merely myths that accompanied a ritual drama of the expected kind. The oddities of the theory stand out most conspicuously in his treatment of the Homeric saga. Here we are expected to believe that Achilles and Hector never in fact existed, that the siege of

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3 See H. H. Rowley in *MRK*, pp. 236-60.
Troy is a fiction and that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were a sung or spoken accompaniment of a mock king-killing. It would seem that no one could read either epic and ever come to a conclusion of this kind.

To begin with, where and at what sort of Greek festival would we expect to find these tales? Admittedly the first text of Homer seems to date back to the *Panathenaia*, the five-yearly festival of rejoicing and renewal which was restored and re-invigorated by Peisistratus in the sixth century, but even if our present Homer were of that date, there is ample evidence that it incorporates far earlier lays and traditions, and Homer incorporates so much that is quite irrelevant to a ritual drama, and omits so much that would be necessary to it, that the theory must fall down on that account alone.

As to the date of Homer, opinion seems to be hardening in assigning him to the very end of the eighth or the beginning of the seventh century. This agrees very well with literary and archaeological evidence: for example, the first scenes from the *Iliad* on Athenian vases are of about the middle of the sixth century, and the elegiac and lyric poets of the seventh century, such as Archilochus and Mimnermus, obviously knew him. Recent archaeological work in the Troad continues to confirm the topographical accuracy of the *Iliad* on points of detail, which it would be absurd to suppose were accidentally and irrelevantly correct in a ritual poem composed in Athens. Even if one were to grant that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were composed specially for the *Panathenaia*, they are in no way composed for a ritual in the sense that Lord Raglan intends.

But we have left entirely out of consideration another very powerful argument, that from literary excellence. In Homer for the first time we are confronted with a poem of the very highest quality, which bears every mark of a personally and individually creative mind. The Sumerian and Ugaritic and Babylonian and Egyptian

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2 J. D. Beazley, *The Development of Attic Black-Figure* (Berkeley, California, 1951).

3 Professor J. M. Cook reported the results of a further exploration of possible sites for the Greek camp at Troy in a paper read to the Archaeological Society of the University of Manchester in November 1960.
ritual texts take us back into a dim semi-articulate world, where
formulae are repeated and incantations spelt out, where ugly
proper names form the major content of many verses, where, in a
word, no one ever seems to show any literary sensibility whatso­
ever. Contrast the mleccha-like grunts of a Ras-Shamra text
with the rapidity, the nobility, the simplicity of any passage from
the Iliad. The authorship of Homer remains an enigma, but on
the evidence for design in both poems examined by Bowra, Nilsson,
Schadewaldt, Focke and others ¹; from the fact that the Odyssey
never overlaps the Iliad, though it fills several gaps in that story;
that both poems show a narrative strategy unsurpassed in any
literature, it seems that, whether or not the same person composed
them, each was given its present form by a single person with all
the resources of a professional bard at his finger-tips, and that
the author of the Odyssey was intimately acquainted with the Iliad.

This point has not indeed been given its due weight by
Homeric scholars from Wolf onwards: the art of selection, for
instance, is well exampled by the plot of the Iliad, which takes
one single episode of the Trojan war, the wrath of Achilles over
the stealing by Agamemnon of the slave-girl Briseis, and skilfully
interweaves events so that the whole panorama of the long-drawn­
out war is before us. Again, the poet's delight in his art, his love
of storytelling for its own sake, come out in a score of places.
Lord Raglan confessed that he could read little or no Greek, and
implies that textual scholars, brought up on textual and
linguistic training, utterly misunderstand the underlying meaning
of Homer. And what of the opinions of a critic who cannot even
read the language?

Even the Norse sagas, which with the Hindu epics form the
nearest parallel to Homer, cannot compare with him in literary
art; but there is an instructive parallel here, nevertheless. Both
the Norse sagas and the Greek epics were in a sense a case of
supply and demand. Both were based on lays written for de­
clamation at the carousals of a warrior clan, with no more concern
for myth and ritual than the man in the moon. In Odyssey viii,

¹ See Bowra, Tradition and Design in the Iliad (Oxford, 1930); Nilsson,
Homer and Mycenae (London, 1953); Schadewaldt, Iliasstudien (Liepzig, 1938);
Focke, Die Odysee (Stuttgart, 1943). The most recent study of the problem is
by D. L. Page, History and the Homeric Iliad (Berkeley, California, 1959).
62 ff. we see an actual banquet portrayed for us, at which the blind bard is led in and placed on a seat of honour, where he proceeds to declaim the mighty deeds of the past—who can doubt the possibility that Homer had himself in mind? Everywhere the Aryan invaders went, from Troy to Mohenjo-daro, we see their brutal indifference to the cults and rites of the native population—Semisepulta virum curvis feriuntur aratris Ossa as Ovid says (Heroides i. 55-6).¹ They are utterly outside the influence of the nexus of Near-Eastern religions where alone we find evidence of a sacred kingship and the rest.

The serious and considered judgement of classical scholars, as of the Greeks themselves, has been that the Iliad is the epic of a distant campaign with at least a foundation in history; the exact period does not matter. Archaeology continues to justify this view; and Lord Raglan’s dictum that no author of a cultic text was ever allowed to invent anything rather hamstrings him in seeking to trace the origins of the Trojan myth.

Why should we not assume that Agamemnon was king and leader of the Greek hosts, each of which comes with its prince, e.g. Achilles and Odysseus, to besiege Troy either because of the rape of some princess or just for the sake of war as the Norsemen invaded our shores? That after ten years of intermittent fighting, probably including long periods when nothing was happening, Troy was sacked and the conquerors returned home? Admittedly there are some queer features in the story, but are they made any less queer by treating the whole story as a fairy tale made up to accompany some rite? Or by seeing a sinister significance in certain items such as the frequent occurrence of the figure ten?

What objections does Lord Raglan put forward to the simple, straightforward interpretation of the story? Or rather, what are his main contentions on this whole question? He puts the case in its extreme form, whereas nearly all other writers on the subject of myth and ritual treat the Greek evidence as a weak link in a long chain. His views are to be found in chapters IX and XV of The Hero.

¹ Sir Mortimer Wheeler strongly believes that it was the Aryans who were responsible for the last massacre at Mohenjo-daro. See The Indus Age, p. 92; "On circumstantial evidence such as this, considered in the light of the chronology as now inferred, Indra stands accused."
(1) The details of the siege of Troy, such as the leadership of Agamemnon, the motives for the siege and its duration, are all unlikely; nothing is known to history of any of the characters in the epic. Therefore it is a myth.

(2) Greek religion in the eighth century B.C. consisted of sacrificial worship of heroes at local shrines combined with the periodic performance of more important and more generalised rites. These, especially the games and contests associated with them, as in *Iliad* xxiii, are survivals from a primitive state of society in which the king was an all-important figure.

(3) The status of the victors in the Olympic games, the title of ἄρχων βασιλεύς at Athens and other signs, suggest that this kingship was of a purely ritual character; and this attitude to kingship is implicit in Homer and in early Greek myth.

(4) The dramatic ritual represented the death and resurrection of a king who was also a god, performed by priests and members of the royal family. There was a sacred combat followed by a triumphal procession in which the neighbouring gods took part, an enthronement, a ceremony to determine the destinies of the state for the year, and a sacred marriage.¹

(5) The story of Helen is a myth to explain the worship of Helen in different parts of Greece. Several Homeric heroes were likewise the objects of a cult.

(6) Early peoples have little sense of time and therefore would not picture the events in the *Iliad* as taking place in a remote past, but as something recreated by a rite.

(7) The attacks on Troy and Thebes are so alike that they are probably identical in origin.

(8) The parting of Hector from Andromache and the slaying of Hector are paralleled in the mythology of Java and elsewhere, various incidents in the *Iliad* correspond with known features of maze ritual (Lord Raglan falls into the trap of instancing the entry of the wooden horse, which of course does not occur in Homer), Odysseus visits the dead as part of his progress towards divine kingship (in fact, of course, Odysseus does not visit the dead, but entices the shades to earth), and various incidents in the story of Ajax son of Oileus which again do not occur in Homer (e.g. his violation of Cassandra at the sack of Troy) have a ritual and sacrificial ring.

(9) Therefore the *Iliad* and presumably the *Odyssey* are myths to accompany the ritual enactments of the death and rebirth of a king-god.

Most of these statements would be quite irrelevant even if true; but many of them, such as (4), are mere assertion unaccompanied by any evidence whatever. Let us take them seriatim:

(1) It is misleading to assert that we know nothing historically of Agamemnon and his fellow princes. What little we can gather from Linear B texts shows that at least some Homeric names were known in the fifteenth century B.C., and although it is scarcely fair to urge Linear B against Lord Raglan, yet Mycenae

¹ Here Lord Raglan is obviously following the article by S. H. Hooke, in *Myth and Ritual*, pp. 8 ff.
is surely circumstantial enough. Lord Raglan is sceptical because a Dark Age succeeded to that of Homer, which is he says unlikely; one does not see why. As to the details of the siege, its motives and its duration being improbable, that is purely a matter of opinion and quite extraneous to the issue.

(2) This is true, but what has it to do with Homer? Does Lord Raglan mean that Homer cannot have come from such a background? One may refer him once more to the findings of archaeology.

(3) The status of the victors in the games proves nothing, since the games in the Iliad are a late and, as some think, extraneous part of the story. As to the ἄρχων βασιλέας at Athens, more of him in a moment. There is little or no evidence that Agamemnon was a ritual king.

(4) This is merely a list of the chief features of the Myth and Ritual pattern in the ancient Near East, with the unsupported assertion that these features are found in Greek religious practice.

(5) The story of the siege of Troy does anything but explain the worship of Helen in various parts of Greece, particularly in Sparta.

(6) Again, there seem no grounds whatever for such a rash assertion.

(7) Even if the stories of Troy and Thebes were very similar (and their likeness has been exaggerated) this would only show that sieges are apt to be alike anyway, and that similar legends accrued in a similar situation.

(8) This contention is sufficiently refuted by the fact that several of the chief incidents which support it are not found in Homer, and that they occur in the Homeric Cycle is not the point.

An obvious difficulty at the outset is, who is the hero or god-king commemorated in the presumed ritual? I should have thought Agamemnon or Achilles; but no, it is now Hector and now Odysseus. But they cannot both be god-kings celebrated in the same ritual poem, and if the two poems are for separate rituals, why is it that so many incidents are completely irrelevant to the main theme; e.g. the catalogue of ships, the innumerable
battles, the exploits of Odysseus and Diomede, and above all the slaying of Patroclus?

This is not to say that Homer does not obviously embody primitive tradition in which Myth and Ritual features may have been present. The sacral kingship is the most important element in the whole Myth and Ritual theory, and it can be argued very plausibly that the epic kings had to perform rituals, and had certain characteristics, which may be explained on the theory that they were originally king-gods, champions of the people. It is now certain that the Cretan Zeus, whose name was taken over by the Olympian supreme god, was actually a pre-Greek deity. Furumark argues that it was the Mycenaean Greeks who made the identification when they established themselves in Knossos in about 1475 B.C., and that they simply identified the Cretan supreme god with their own. He adds that the Palai­kastro hymn, which is a true ritual text, shows the μεγιστός κούρος to be an annually returning god who by his act of begetting brings fertility, prosperity, peace and justice, and is identified with the Cretan Zeus through his cult-myth. "Birth (the Divine Child motive), death (ridiculed by Callimachus), and resurrection (annual return) belong to the characteristics of this god." ¹ Both Furumark and E. O. James see in the magnificence of the palace and of the Temple Tomb, the carved throne, the frescoes of griffins (the guardians of the gods), the sacred furnishings, strong evidence that the Minoan king was divine, and infer the rest of his functions as a ritual champion and promoter of fertility and the like.²

Zeus was in the earliest myth miraculously born and has a body­guard or θιάσος of dancers in which Jane Harrison saw evidence of an initiation rite.³ He kills his father Kronos and usurps his throne, but although at times in the Iliad he appears omnipotent, yet τύχη is stronger than he, and it may be that he originally main­tained his power only by some ritual purification or atonement.⁴

¹ Furumark, "Was there a Sacral Kingship in Minoan Crete?" in La Regalità Sacra, a series of papers read at the 8th International Congress of the History of Religions, Rome, 1955 (Leiden, 1959), pp. 369-70.
² See E. O. James, Myth and Ritual in the Ancient Near East, pp. 101 ff.
³ Jane Harrison, Themis (Cambridge, 1912), pp. 1-29.
⁴ A. B. Cook, Zeus, vol. iii (Cambridge, 1940), collects a large amount of material, but his conclusions are not universally accepted.
Yet these scholars seem in their busy collection of odd ritual facts and bits of archaeological evidence to overlook entirely certain simple common-sense considerations which would instantly occur to a layman not weighed down with learning. What do we expect of a king, or what was the character of kingship in the ancient world? Some of the exponents of Myth and Ritual seem to think that the ritual came first and that the mysterious Melchizedek-like figures of kings came later and played the part assigned to them in the ritual. But it is in human nature to love power and to seek it by conquest and maintain it by cruelty. We do not need the bland sophistries of Herodotus 1 to tell us that in the long run things tend to revert to dictatorship, and there was certainly nothing mythical or ritual about the atrocities committed by the Sultans of Delhi or by Adolf Hitler. Once an ancient despot was established on his throne it was natural that he should be regarded as divine: he was the embodiment of supreme power and simple minds would think he could command the weather as well; so he would find it convenient to accept worship as omnipotent and even to go through the motions of offering sacrifice for fertility and increase in order to keep his subjects contented. In this sense there may have been a sacral kingship in early Greece, but it has left very few influences of any note on the Greece of the classical period.

In this connection Professor H. J. Rose read an illuminating paper, full of healthy scepticism, to the International Congress for the History of Religions in Rome in 1955. 2 Archaeology, he says, gives us no warrant for seeing in the Minoan king any sort of ritual figure; all we know is that he had a magnificent palace which contained a chapel full of sacred emblems and the like. Minoan art never shows us the king in company with the gods or even sacrificing to them, as Oriental art often does. In any case, we learn from Minos very little about Greece proper.

The gods in Homer are immortal, ἀθάνατοι. They lead a life in the empyrean, far from care, and amuse themselves by allotting ills to mankind (cf. the Epicurean picture of the gods

1 See his discourse on the three forms of government, iii. 80-2.
given by Achilles to Priam, *Iliad* xxiv, 525-6). They are completely above even kings, so there can be no question here of identifying a king with a god, for the essence of the Myth and Ritual theory is that the king shall undergo death and revivification in his combat with evil, and so the king and the god are both mortal. Admittedly Homer has Graecized and rationalized the myths, but there is a limit to what would be found acceptable innovation in an epic, and it would be truer to say that the Greek spirit is too rational to tolerate such identification for long. In the *Iliad* Agamemnon receives a good deal of homage on occasion, and no prince speaks in the assembly without holding the sceptre which symbolizes power, but Achilles can speak as sharply as a bargee to Agamemnon as in *Iliad* i. 225 ff. (or is this ritual reviling? I have seen equally absurd suggestions seriously mooted). Possibly Alcinous comes nearest to the ancient conception of a divine king: he married a goddess or at least the daughter of a goddess (*Od.* vii, 66-72) and the devotion which Arete enjoyed is described so emphatically that I am surprised that no one has detected here traces of a *hieros gamos*; Arete was his cousin, which again suggests the divine in-breeding characteristic of ritual kingship; Alcinous himself is the “idol” of his people (*Od.* vii. 11), he is divine (167). But he appears quite ignorant of the will of the gods and speaks of placating them with sacrifices like any ordinary human being (vii. 199 ff). No one would dream that he might be a ritual figure without being steeped previously in Myth and Ritual so as to be morbidly vigilant for clues. Rose sees the possibility of a Frazerian king in *Od.* xix. 109 ff, where Odysseus likens Penelope to “a perfect king, ruling a populous and mighty state with the fear of god in his heart, and upholding the right, so that the dark soil yields its wheat and barley, the trees are laden with ripe fruit, the sheep never fail to bring forth their lambs, nor the sea to provide its fish—all as a result of his good government—and his people prosper under him”; but he adds that there is nothing here more than would be expected of a good and just earthly king.

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1 Among the Incas this was carried so far that a king could only marry his sister; see P. Radin, “The Sacral Chief among American Indians” in *La Regalità Sacra*, p. 94.

2 *La Regalità Sacra*, p. 373.
Turning to history, the two kings at Sparta originally had priestly functions, but the duality of kingship, like the duality of the Roman consulship, may have originally been as much military as religious. Kings are often priests in the ancient world, but the division between priest and layman is not so great in some communities as in others—in Greece a priest had no separate status at all apart from honorary offices except as part of the official duty devolving upon a high magistrate. We now come to the Athenian ἄρχων βασιλεύς, who by his title seems at first sight to be the very person we are looking for. The duties of archon or ruler in Athens were shared by a body of nine, of whom the first was later called ἔπώνυμος as giving his name to the year, the second βασιλεύς or king and the third πολέμαρχος or war-leader; the remaining six were called θεσμόθετα or legislators. It used to be thought that the title βασιλεύς referred to the legendary days when kings ruled Athens, but later scholarship seems to run counter to this view and to regard the title as almost wholly connected with religion. For example, the philosopher Heraclitus was made βασιλεύς of Ephesus. The duties of the ἄρχων βασιλεύς at Athens were to preside at the Dionysia, to superintend the Mysteries and to offer up sacrifices at both Athens and Eleusis. Indictments for impiety and controversies about the priesthood were laid before him; and in cases of murder he brought the trial before the Areopagus and voted with its members. His wife, called queen, βασιλισσα, had to offer certain sacrifices and it was therefore required that she be a citizen of pure stock and previously unmarried. She had to take part in a remarkable sacred marriage with Dionysus at the Anthesteria, but whatever significance there may have been in this was the wrong way round for the Myth and Ritual theorists. The βασιλεύς was merely a magistrate annually elected, and no special significance was attached to his office.

Kings were often called by cult-titles in early Greece as in other Near-Eastern communities. Rose discusses this whole problem in the article already quoted, and makes two important points: firstly, that as regards divine titles the evidence has often

1 See Pauly's Real-Encyclopädie, s.v. Archontes.
2 Aristotle, ΑΘ, πολ., 3. 5.
been late and uncritically used (he instances Periphas, a king supposedly so ancient that Kekrops had not yet been produced from the earth, yet who appears only in Hellenistic sources and in authors like Ovid who copied them); and secondly, that no one theory will account for the numerous kings and prominent figures to whom the name Zeus is at one time or another appended. To this one might add that the important point is whether there are any traces of cult accompanying the myth (in the case of Periphas there are none—Rose sees in him a "faded god whose cult was later absorbed by Zeus or perhaps by Apollo"), and also that such considerations as time and place are significant. Rose explains some of the cult-titles by syncretism: "For example since Zeus is (among other titles) Soter and Soter is also a favourite title of Asklepios, I see no reason why the minor, but enormously popular, god should not have been on occasion identified with the greater one." If this explanation sounds a little too verbal, yet by our own experience we can concede that it would be easy to imagine each god in turn as the only true and great god, of whom all the other god-kings and god-men are aspects.

There are legends in Greek epic which conform to the requirements of a ritual myth, but it seems that a hero is more often than a king looked upon as the champion of a people against the forces of destruction. Glauces in *Iliad* vi. 152 ff tells Diomede how queen Anteia, the wife of Proetus king of Ephyre in Argos, fell in love with the young nobleman Bellerophon, was repulsed and forthwith lied to her husband with the result that Bellerophon was sent to Lycia with sealed tablets instructing the king of Lycia to kill him. Bellerophon is set a number of superhuman tasks, all of which he accomplishes. This familiar theme, which recurs in the stories of Jason and Heracles, is taken by Raglan and others to indicate a struggle between a hero-king and the forces of destruction, which was ritually enacted for the purpose of securing the fertility of the land for another year. The old charioteer Phoenix tells a similar story about himself in *Iliad* ix. 434 ff., the chief features of which are that he obtains the love of his father's paramour, is driven away by his father in consequence and entertains thoughts of murdering him. This

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1 *La Regalità Sacra*, pp. 373-4.
looks like an even more primitive form of the story with elements akin to the legend of Oedipus. Yet with all this I cannot help the suspicion that these tales are told for their own sake to a delighted audience who have no interest whatever in myth and ritual.

Did the hero-cult, which reached its peak in the Games, originate in a sacred combat for the renewal of fertility? In its essentials we have a young man such as Theseus or Jason or Heracles, himself of divine or semi-divine parenthood, undergoing various labours for various peoples in the course of which he comes near to losing his life. A noteworthy feature here, and one which militates somewhat against the Myth and Ritual interpretation of the story, is the vagrancy of the hero, who appears as a kind of strong man out of the West, the kind of champion who in a diluted form enjoys much popularity nowadays in such incarnations as the Lone Ranger (and incidentally the Lone Ranger is a good test case—is he or is he not a cult figure? And if he is, who cares about this when watching his exploits on television?)

Of this kind of hero the outstanding example is of course Heracles, the son of Zeus and Alcmene according to Homer. As he lies in his cradle Hera sends two serpents to destroy him, but he strangles them with his bare hands. Throughout his career he is liable to outbursts of primitive violence; thus he is instructed by the youth Linos in lyre-playing, but kills him after receiving a rebuke, and is then sent by Amphitryon, who is instructing him in chariot-driving, to look after cattle. After various pugilistic adventures he is driven mad by Hera and kills his own children. As a purification he is ordered by the Delphic priestess to serve Eurystheus of Tiryns for twelve years. During this time he performs his twelve labours, all of which involve the destruction of a national scourge, and one of which includes a journey to the underworld to bring back Cerberus. Heracles marries Deianeira the daughter of Oineus after fighting with the river Achelous for her (I do not know if there is a ritual significance in fighting with rivers). He accidentally kills a lad Eunomus and goes into exile, in the course of which the centaur Nessus attacks Deianeira and is killed by a poisoned arrow. The
dying centaur calls to Deianeira to take his blood with her as a sure means of retaining the love of her husband; Heracles carries off Iole the daughter of Eurytus of Oechalia and comes to Euboea whence he sends his companion Lichas to Trachis for a white garment which he intends to put on for sacrifice. Deianeira, thinking it is for Iole, steeps the garment in the blood of Nessus, and when he puts it on Heracles suffers the most excruciating agony. He immolates himself on a pyre on Mount Oeta and is received into Olympus where he marries Hebe the daughter of Hera. And yet he is not at home on Olympus, for Homer makes Odysseus see him in Hades and be puzzled thereat: “Next I observed the mighty Heracles—that is, his shade, since he himself banquets with the immortal gods and has for consort Hebe” (Od. xi. 601 ff).¹

One obvious fact emerging from all this is that the Heracles legend is in reality a collection of stories of various dates and places all gathered round the one name, and, one may suspect, often merely variants of the same story. The descent into Hades is very like the sacred combat, but it is also told of Theseus and Orpheus, and the point that matters is, Had the story any ritual significance at the time of our literary sources? The answer is surely very little. Euripides uses in the Alcestis a primitive myth about Heracles fighting with death, and here it does seem that there is a very strong cultic flavour about the story, which was almost certainly taken over by Euripides from a very early source, as was his wont. Jane Harrison collected evidence to show that Heracles was originally a year daimon.² His labours are twelve, a significant number for astronomy and the calendar. His club was originally a bough from a living tree, and in an Orphic hymn is referred to as banishing the Keres or fates; in the left hand he is sometimes represented with a cornucopia which he broke off from the river Achelous when it fought him in the shape of a bull. The wooing of Deianeira may be a hieros gamos or ritual marriage. Herodotus remarks (ii. 44) that his researches prove Heracles to be a figure of great antiquity and quotes with approval those

¹ A convenient summary of the legends about Heracles will be found in the Oxford Classical Dictionary, s.v.
² Harrison, Themis, chap. ix.
Greeks who see him as a dual figure, both god and hero, and who worship these aspects of him in separate temples. Diodorus Siculus (iv. 39) says that at Opous the inhabitants were ordered to make a yearly sacrifice in honour of the hero Heracles. It seems, then, that Heracles is more of a Myth and Ritual figure than Agamemnon.

The origin of the Olympic Games has been dealt with by F. M. Cornford in a separate chapter of Themis. His conclusions are that the games were originally an annual or quadrennial sacrifice ritual, and in essence a New Year festival, the inauguration of a year. The traditional myth was that Pelops beat Oenomaus in a chariot race in which Oenomaus had been wont to pursue and slay all suitors for his daughter Hippodameia. At the funeral of Oenomaus Pelops held magnificent games. Here one can recognize the contest between young and old kings, so central a feature of the myth and ritual of death and rebirth, a theme which has been carried to such lengths by Margaret Murray that she sees in the deaths of William Rufus, John, Edward II and Richard II the ritual slaying of a king of declining powers.1 There is also the harpage or carrying-off of the bride, possibly some survival of a sacred marriage.

A. B. Cook once suggested that in mythical times the Olympic contest was a means of deciding who should be king of the district and champion of the local tree-Zeus.2 In historic times the victor was treated with divine honours, feasted in the prytaneum, crowned with a spray of olive like the wreath of Zeus, and when he returned to his native city he was dressed in royal purple and drawn by white horses through a breach in the walls (honours almost as extravagant are paid to the winning football team in the cup final at Wembley). In some cases he was worshipped after death as a hero; and this may be because he was once thought to be incarnate god. Plutarch (Symposium, v. 2. 675) says: "I hesitate to mention that in ancient times there was also held at Pisa a contest consisting of a single combat, which ended only with the slaughter and death of the vanquished."

1 Margaret Murray, "The Divine King", in La Regalità Sacra, pp. 595-608.
2 See Classical Review, xvii. 268 ff. Professor Cook's views have, of course, been elaborated, and an immense amount of material collected, in his Zeus.
The word "year" does not necessarily denote a solar year, for Servius on Aen. iii. 284 remarks that "the ancients computed their time by the heavenly bodies and at first called a period of thirty days a lunar year". There is little evidence of the variation of meaning of the Greek word ἔτος, but it is possible that the four-year period constituting an Olympiad may be a survival of a longer year. The difficulty here is to reconcile a longer year with the renewal of fertility in men, animals and crops, a ceremony which would necessarily take place each year. A fifth-century krater in Chicago¹ shows Salmoneus, a weather-king arrayed with the attributes of an Olympic victor, wearing a fetter on his left ankle, and there are traces of a Κρόνος πέδητης who was released annually at the winter festival. Cornford's explanation, if it can be called such, is that the single combat and possibly the whole festival may have originally taken place in midwinter, but that every forty-nine or fifty months the lunar year of 354 days and the solar year of 365 ¹/₄ days coincided by the addition of intercalary months, and that at some time a fresh "great year" was inaugurated, beginning in midsummer.

Other features in the development of the Games may be briefly noted: Pausanias (v, 7, 6) sees in the games a celebration of the birth of the Cretan Zeus, at which the Kouretes danced; Pindar relates in this connection the legend of Tantalus serving up to the gods the body of his son Pelops boiled in a cauldron; Zeus' miraculous restoring of the child is taken by Cornford as a ritual of new birth preceded by a symbolic and counterfeit death. This gives us, he says, the ritual needed to complete the religion of the mother and child and the Kouretes in the Idaean cave beneath the hill of Kronos. There are several myths of the eating of children, Thyestes, Kronos, Zeus, and Cornford connects this with the succession to an annual or periodic kingdom.

To sum up, Cornford's conclusions about the Victor and the Hero: the triumphal procession, with its sacrifice and eating of a bull, the hymn to the hero and the concluding feast in the banqueting chamber, was the central rite and the foot-race was a preliminary. The race was originally run to determine who should be the greatest Kouros or king of his year, but developed

¹ See Harrison, Themis, p. 80.
into the vast sports of classical times. Even in historic times there is evidence that the person of the victor was not of primary importance. The earliest salute to the victor was "Hail, king Heracles!" and even in Pindar's Odes there is a personal reference only at the beginning and the end. The rest is occupied with the deeds of ancestors and the δαίμων γενεθλιώς or genius of his house, and it is this δαίμων incarnate which is the real subject of commemoration. Cornford draws the analogy here between the victory ode and tragedy. Both—and this is even more true of early tragedy—begin with a ritual to which the accompanying myth is secondary.

At least part of the expiation for past sins in Greece as in Israel and other countries devolved upon the φαρμακός or scapegoat, literally "remedy". In Iliad, ii. 217 ff., 258 ff., we come across a man who might have been drawn for the part, Thersites. He was the ugliest man to come to Ilion. He had a game foot and was bandy-legged. His rounded shoulders almost met across his chest; and above them rose an egg-shaped head, which sprouted a few short hairs. Achilles and Odysseus were his favourite butts. He rails at Agamemnon, and Odysseus threatens to strip him naked and cast him out of the assembly to blubber by the ships.

In various Greek states the φαρμακός was loaded with insults and driven forth from men. In Harpocration's lexicon we read that in Athens at the Thargelia (the harvest of first-fruits in May and June) they led out two men as καθάρσια or purifications for the city, one for the men and one for the women; he gives an explanation involving a φαρμακός who had stolen cups from Apollo and was killed in consequence, and adds καὶ τὰ τοῖς βαργῆλιοι ἀγόμενα τούτων ἀπομίμηματα ἐστών, the ceremony at the Thargelia was an imitation of this. Helladius in the lexicon of Photius agrees with this account. The ceremony of casting out the φαρμακός may at one time have involved human sacrifice, and Rohde thought that several allusions in the lyric and comic poets of the classical period showed that this was still true, but Murray argued that the language involved no more than a mimetic ceremony. The


significance of the φαρμακός is that he is a sin-offering to a god who is not wholly but at least partly "other", and cannot very well exist side by side with a king-god who dies and is reborn as champion of his people and the expiator of their sins. The motive may have been the same but the conception was quite different.

There were two strains in the blood of the Greek: the indigenous, pastoral strain, reflected in myths such as that of Demeter, and the nomadic, active strain evidenced in the Achaean invasions and reflected in Homer. In the legend of Demeter and Persephone we find another variant of the myth of the mother-goddess which, as we have seen, is evidenced as early as the fourth millennium B.C. There are many representations of this goddess in Minoan and Mycenaean art. The general opinion, held, e.g. by Nilsson, Farnell and Picard, is that the goddess represents the earth and the young god who is seen with her is sacrificed and born again. The goddess appears under a variety of names, Rhea, Britomartis, Dictynna, Aphaia, and in various guises as divine mother, as protectress of animals and as a warrior goddess. Sir Arthur Evans gives representatives of her worship by Zeus or Zagreus, and Axel W. Persson claims to detect a cycle in the worship of this deity from Mycenaean rings. He affects to find on these rings mourning ceremonies connected with a burial in which dying vegetation is portrayed; dances and the giving of gifts; various forms of thanksgiving at the return of spring, budding flowers, rain and decorated shrines; bull games; a summer festival showing both god and goddess; and the goddess of fertility departing over the sea in a divine boat. Aphaia, Aphrodite, Ariadne, Artemis, Demeter, Eileithuia, Helen, Persephone—all are worshipped under this guise; and we find Dionysos, Erichthonios, Eros, Glaukos, Hyacinthos, Cronos and the Cretan Zeus at times in the rôle of the youthful god.

2 Evans, The Palace of Minos, vols. iii and iv.
3 A. W. Persson, The Religion of Greece in Prehistoric Times (Berkeley, California, 1942), pp. 25-104.
The Eleusinian mysteries are a vast subject and do not afford much help to the seeker after the conventional Myth and Ritual pattern. They originated in a festival of the sowing, which took place in Boedromion (Sept./Oct.), and if the Homeric Hymn to Demeter is a cult-text, as it very well may be, we are presented with a goddess-figure, Persephone, to typify the death and rebirth of the year. She is a very ancient figure, almost as terrifying as the Zhob figurines which Stuart Piggott found in Baluchistan; in Homer she is always the “dread goddess” whose name is coupled with that of Hades as passing judgement on the dead when they reached the underworld. In the Homeric Hymn all this primitive awe is dispelled and we find an innocent maiden who reminds us of The Winter’s Tale. The whole hymn is full of forward-looking allusions to the Mysteries, but we are still in ignorance of what was disclosed to initiates. It may be that one might seek an analogy with the democratization of Egyptian religion associated with Osiris in the assurance of personal immortality, which was the greatest gift conferred at Eleusis. A young god or goddess dies, is lamented and rises again by miraculous means, and the rejoicing over his resurrection may include a sacred marriage between the god and a mortal, in this case the wife of the archon basileus. But whether this is a marriage of the “Myth and Ritual” kind, what significance it had for the participants, to what extent it was influenced by foreign cults, are questions to which there is no final answer.

One important point to stress in conclusion is that the myth of the king-god, though it left certain traces in older Greek legend, had no lasting or deep influence on Greek religion and certainly not on its literature. The Iliad remains a great poem ranking with the Aeneid, Paradise Lost and La Divina Commedia, and its morality and outlook are to be classed with theirs. A malady of our present age is that we now know about the Subconscious and that, brought up on Freud, we see in religion no more than “beastly devices of the heathen”. There is something alien and repellent about the Sumerian gods, about Marduk and the Pharaonic king-god, about the Eye-Goddess and Moloch and Baal; we do not regard them any the more favourably for

1 E.g. Od. xi. 213, 635.
knowing more about them. The nineteenth-century interpreters of the Classics got more out of them than we do because they went straight to the noble and rational and uplifting things which are the real legacy of Greek literature and did not probe into the primeval slime from which it emerged. The same is true of the Christian religion; it was once said of Frazer that the worst kind of Polynesian superstition would fare better at his hands than evangelical Christianity, and his school of interpretation has certainly done harm as well as good in focussing attention on the often degrading and worthless cults of remote tribes instead of on the central phenomena of religion in contemporary society. It is pleasing to think that a sober and sceptical judgement finds little to justify wild theories about the presence of the Myth and Ritual pattern in Greek literature.