

An Orpheus Among the Animals at Dumbarton Oaks

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FROM TRANSITIONS between given historical periods come some of the more problematic cases of meaning in the visual arts, where the precise significance of a subject can shift with changes in iconographic detail, the audience, or the specific context within which the subject is understood. A textile from Egypt in the collection of Dumbarton Oaks (PLATE 1) offers such a case, though it has received scant attention.¹ The traditional periodic designations of 'Early Christian', 'Byzantine', or 'Coptic', which might be applied to this textile, lose something of their convenience here because they indicate a more precise and certain religious intention on the part of the creator and the consumer of the object than the complex conditions of surviving pagan and developing Christian traditions and our imperfect modern understanding of them would seem to warrant. The subject here is not an uncommon one in works of visual art from Late Antiquity: Orpheus charming a gathering of animals with his song. A possible Christian interpretation of Orpheus generally, and by extension this old pagan subject in particular has been much discussed.² But the Christian interpretations

¹ Inv. 74.124.19. H. Peirce and R. Tyler, *L'art byzantin* (Paris 1934) 122; J. Huskinson, "Some Pagan Mythological Figures and their Significance in Early Christian Art," *BRS* 42 (1974) 92 n.12. J. B. Friedman, "Syncretism and Allegory in the Jerusalem Mosaic," *Traditio* 23 (1967) 8 n.25, refers to this textile as one of three examples of Early Christian depictions of Orpheus including a Pan or centaur; in fact there are others, as will be discussed below.

² For recent consideration of the visual evidence, J. B. Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1970); Huskinson (*supra* n.1) 68-73, 86-91; H. Stern, "Orphée dans l'art paléochrétien," *CahArch* 23 (1974) 1-16; C. Murray, "The Christian Orpheus," *CahArch* 26 (1977) 19-27; H. Stern, "Les débuts de l'iconographie d'Orphée charmant les animaux," *Mélanges ... offerts à Jean Lafaurie* (Paris 1980) 157-64; E. Irwin, "The Songs of Orpheus and the New Song of Christ," in J. Warden, ed., *Orpheus: The Metamorphosis of a Myth* (Toronto 1982) 51-62; G. Santagata, "Di un rilievo col mito d'Orfeo fra gli animali dalla basilica cristiana di Pianabella (Ostia Antica). Considerazioni sul tema nella cultura antica," *AnnPerugia* 21 (1983-84) 267-

proposed for Orpheus in some cases do not establish the applicability of the same interpretations everywhere; and the parameters of the Christian interpretations, by genre, function, provenance, *etc.* have not yet been set. Smaller, less imposing objects, like the Dumbarton Oaks textile, have had no place at the table in this discussion, and as objects of private consumption they may respond to an entirely different set of expectations than their larger, more public counterparts.

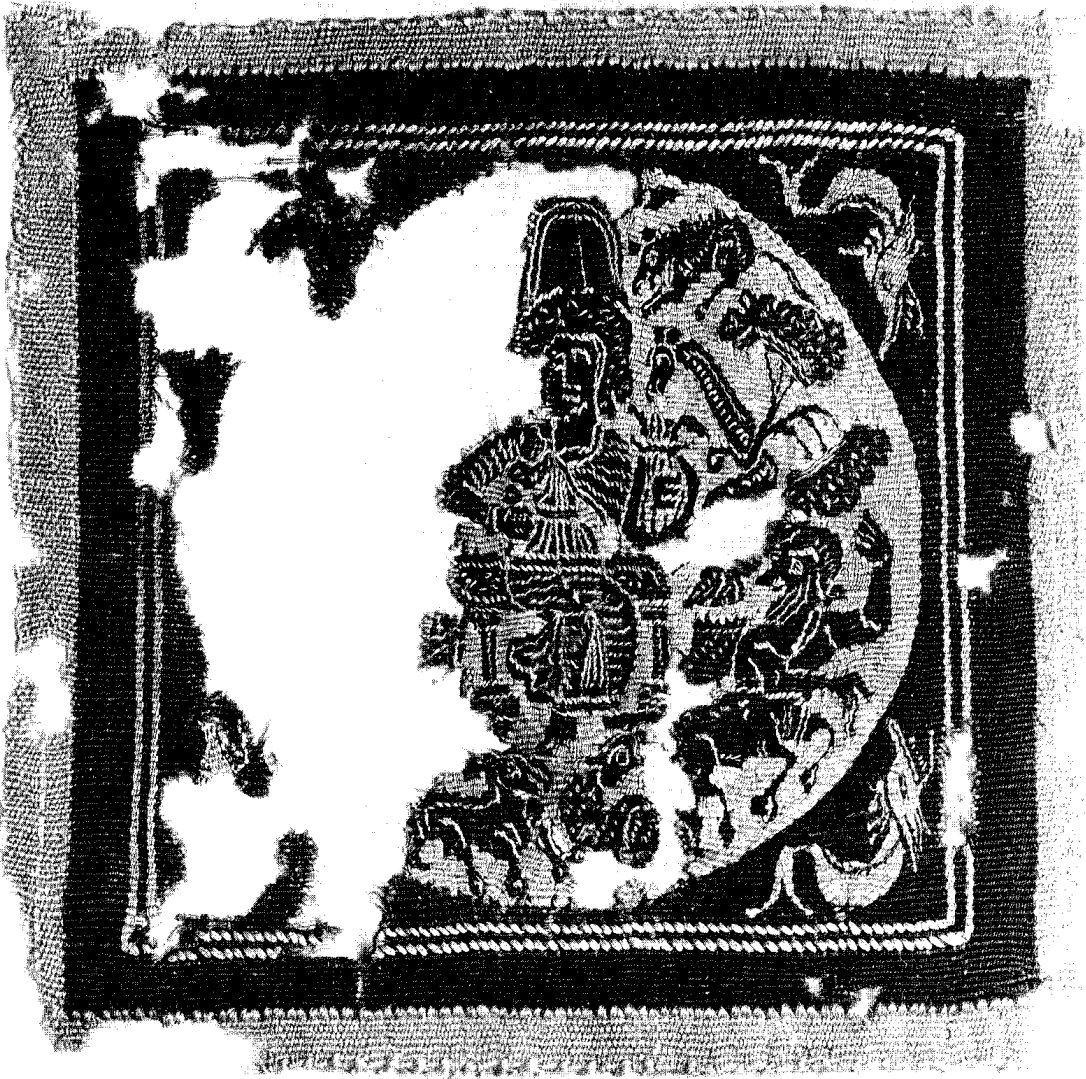
At a cursory glance, the subject of the Dumbarton Oaks textile recalls many of the renderings of the subject in other media. The large figure of Orpheus dominates the setting at center, with the charmed animals shattered over the field surrounding him. But in the selection of the animals depicted in the textile strikes a less familiar note. Filling most of the lower right quadrant and facing away from Orpheus, a centaur turns his head back towards the singer and raises his arms in a languid gesture of astonishment.³ When the presence of the centaur has drawn comment, it has been thought to count for little in understanding the sense of the subject, simply because it would seem to have nothing to do with the story. Huskinson sees the creature as embodying the wildness of nature, an emphasis more striking than in the more conventional animals surrounding Orpheus but not fundamentally different from them.⁴ For Friedman the significance of the centaur lies in the very fact that it has no relation to the story of Orpheus, and thus it

88; P. Prigent, "Orphée dans l'iconographie chrétienne," *RevHistPhilRelig* 64 (1984) 205-21.

³ At the bottom of the panel two quadrupeds of somewhat generalized species balance each other to either side of the vertical axis, perhaps suggesting that another centaur existed in the area lost to damage at left, complementing the extant centaur at right. As a general rule, however, clearly identifiable animals occur in this subject as solitary representatives of their species. An exception is the Kelekian textile discussed below, which features two satyrs. Satyrs, however, are by nature gregarious.

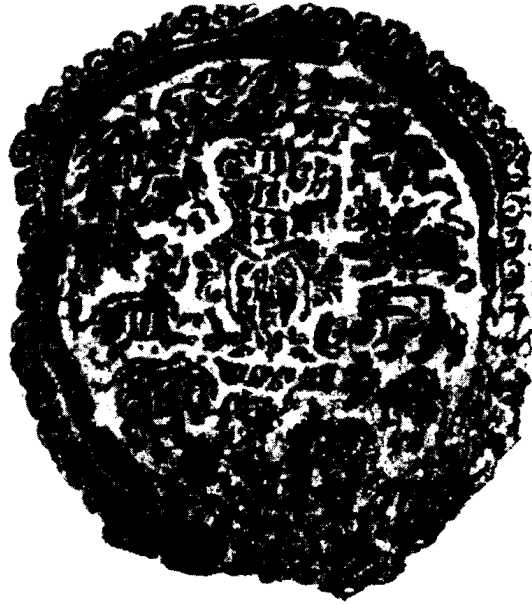
⁴ Huskinson (*supra* n.1) 72 specifically cites the Dumbarton Oaks textile. Examples of centaurs as denizens of the wild, armed for the hunt, are fairly common on Late Antique Egyptian textiles; see D. Renner, *Die koptische Stoffe im Martin von Wagner Museum der Universität Würzburg* (Wiesbaden 1974) 35ff (inv. H 2136), 40f (inv. H 377); G. Egger, *Koptische Textilien* (Vienna 1967) 19 (inv. T 656); P. du Bourguet, *Musée national du Louvre: Catalogue des étoffes coptes I* (Paris 1964) 169 (D 132).

MADIGAN PLATE 1



Textile from Egypt, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.
(74.124.19)

MADIGAN PLATE 2



(a) Egyptian Textile, Moscow (private collection)



(b) Egyptian Textile, Victoria and Albert Museum, London
(1190/P 1054)

reflects the syncretistic tendencies of Late Antiquity.⁵ A variety of beasts, often a selection combining the common and the exotic that fits no specific locale, can be found surrounding Orpheus in other renderings of the subject,⁶ but the appearance of a mythological creature is unusual and would seem to place the Dumbarton Oaks textile outside the pattern for most, and particularly large-scale, renderings of the subject.

A single literary account does mention the centaur in the context of the story of Orpheus charming the animals. In the Ps.-Senecan *Hercules Oetaeus* (1031–60) centaurs inhabiting Mt Athos are brought along, as if under a kind of house arrest, when the very mountain is attracted by Orpheus' song. As this is a rather small detail from the text, however, and the centaurs are not described as charmed by the singing, the textile cannot be considered as simply quoting the text. But the centaur could serve to remind the viewer of the more extensive narrative of which this scene is but a part. By later antiquity the centaur had risen from its status as a mere wild inhabitant of the mountains to become associated with Dionysus as an ally and cohort. Nonnus (*Dion.* 14.264f, 27.30f) has much to say about centaurs in his description of Dionysus' conquest of India. The affiliation of centaurs with Dionysus is reflected on a pair of second-century mosaics, one in the Baths of Trajan in Acholla, and another from a fortress at Cheikh Zouède, where pairs of centaurs draw the god's chariot in triumph.⁷ On the Dumbarton Oaks textile the centaur has been incorporated into a scene

⁵ Friedman (*supra* n.1) 8. Certainly there are well-established associations that the centaur, a creature of unruly passions and given to raucous behavior, call to mind as a foil to Orpheus' lyre, traditionally an image of ordered sound and constraint, and thereby amplify the sense of the power of Orpheus' song over wild nature. See Heraclitus fr. 51 D.-K.; Pl. *Resp.* 399D; Aristid. Quint. 2.18.

⁶ The mosaic from Blanzky-lès-Fismes, now in Laon, is a representative example, including a panther, stag, and elephant in the same gathering. See H. Stern, "La mosaïque d'Orphée de Blanzky-lès-Fismes," *Gallia* 13 (1955) 41–77. Huskinson (*supra* n.1: 70) suggests a correspondence between the appearance of tame animals among the usual wild animals and an intended Christian meaning, although mythological beasts would appear to confuse this simple distinction.

⁷ G.-C. Picard, "Dionysos victorieux sur une mosaïque d'Acholla," *RA* 31 (1949) 810–21; J. Clédat, "Fouilles à Cheikh Zouède (Janvier–Février 1913), *ASAE* 15 (1919) 21–28. For a discussion of the god Dionysus on Late Antique Egyptian textiles generally, see V. F. Lenzen, "The Triumph of Dionysos on Textiles of Late Antique Egypt," *CPCA* 5 (1960) 1–38.

illustrating Orpheus' power, in order to qualify that power. The centaur would refer to the subsequent fate of the singer, when the Thracian women, under the influence of Dionysus and immune to the enchantments of the singing, fall upon him and tear him to pieces.

The essentially negative presentation of the power of Orpheus' song on the textile weighs against reading any hidden Christian message here that equates Orpheus with Christ, as has been argued for some depictions of the subject.⁸ While it need not reflect the religious predilections of the patron, the textile does speak with a pagan voice, and its allusion to the limitations of Orpheus' power would strike a familiar cord for a patron familiar with the treatment of the same subject in Classical literature. Literary descriptions of Orpheus charming the animals are often cited in discussions of the subject, but these discussions often take a fine focus, concerning themselves with the species of animals described; the wider contexts in which these descriptions occur are not usually considered. What is most consistently characteristic of these literary descriptions is that they present Orpheus' power, just as does the Dumbarton Oaks textile, not as an absolute, but as limited or qualified. Orpheus' power over the animals is undercut by description of or reference to his later destruction at the hands of the Thracian women, or his failure to retrieve Eurydice from the Underworld.⁹

Of particular interest for the survival of this appraisal of Orpheus in Late Antiquity is the treatment of the singer in Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae* (3 metrum 12). The text does not usually figure in discussions of the visual renderings of Orpheus charming the animals, as it dates later than many of the large-scale renderings and because the episode in question does not figure prominently in Boethius' tract. Instead, Boethius focuses on Orpheus' descent into the Underworld, the charming of the infernal powers, and his ultimate failure to

⁸ The possible Christian meaning of Orpheus is considered generally by C. Murray, "The Christian Orpheus," *CahArch* 26 (1977) 19–27; Huskinson (*supra* n.1) 69–73; Friedman (*supra* n.2) *passim*; Irwin (*supra* n.2).

⁹ Literary descriptions of Orpheus charming the animals are conveniently discussed in R. G. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book I* (Oxford 1970) 147–50; J. G. Fitch, ed., *Seneca's Hercules Furens* (Ithaca 1987) 268–73. Of particular interest are (in addition to the Ps.-Senecan *Hercules Oetaeus* cited above) Verg. *G.* 5.453–506; [Verg.] *Cul.* 266–91; Ov. *Met.* 10.1–77; Sen. *Herc. Fur.* 569–89; Philostr. *Iun. Imag.* 6.

recover Eurydice. The charming of the animals is placed after his unsuccessful return from the Underworld, and demonstrates that despite the power of his song, it cannot assuage his grief. Boethius holds up the insufficient power of Orpheus as a foil to the positive qualities of Hercules, the Stoic hero who endures and triumphs. For this presentation of Hercules as the archetypal Stoic hero—and in particular the contrast of Hercules with Orpheus—Boethius is indebted to (and in part reformulates a chorus from) Seneca's *Hercules Furens* and, to a lesser degree, the Ps.-Senecan *Hercules Oetaeus*.¹⁰

Boethius' text does not constitute a source for the Dumbarton Oaks textile, but it does bear witness to the strength of a tradition, even among the Christian elite and shared by the roughly contemporary textile, in which Orpheus' power is viewed as flawed.¹¹ That the textile underscores the weakness in Orpheus' power by reference to his destruction at the hands of Dionysus, rather than by his failure to return successfully with Eurydice from the Underworld, appears to be characteristic of the local popularity of that god. Since Alexander of Macedonia and the Ptolemies who ruled after him in Egypt, Dionysian imagery had been propagated diligently for its political value,

¹⁰ O. Zwierlein, *Senecas Hercules im Lichte kaiserzeitlicher und spätantiker Deutung* (Mainz 1984) 31–34, 57–60; S. Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue. Literary Method in the Consolation of Philosophy* (Princeton 1985) 154–65, 193, 237–53; G. O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius* (London 1991) 188–207. The strength of the comparison between Orpheus and Hercules is reflected in its revival during the Renaissance in a letter written by Marsilio Ficino to the college of cardinals: P. O. Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum* II (Florence 1937) 76–79. I am indebted to my colleague Horst Uhr for this reference.

¹¹ Textiles like the one under discussion are rarely preserved with an established archaeological context, either the sites at which they were discovered, or what other medallions they might have been combined with in the decoration of a garment. It should be bourn in mind that the scene of Orpheus among the animals conceivably could have been paired with another portraying the power of Dionysos, or, following the Senecan model, Hercules as the triumphant Stoic hero. The visual comparison of the deeds of Orpheus and Hercules is found in the tomb of one Apuleius Rideus from El-Amrouni in ancient Tripolitania. The three upper friezes with narrative scenes depict Orpheus among the animals, Orpheus departing Hades with Eurydice, and Hercules rescuing Alcestis from Hades. Neither of the Orpheus scenes overtly refers to the failure of his power; it is possible, of course, that the viewer was expected to compare the ultimate results of the two heroes. See P. Berger, "Le mausolée d'El-Amrouni," *RA* (1895) 71–83.

and would be a natural vehicle for expressing irresistible power and triumph.¹²

While surviving depictions of Orpheus charming the animals on textiles from late Roman Egypt are not common and vary in details, each example follows the peculiar (and what must be the local) iconographic pattern illustrated by the Dumbarton Oaks textile, with the singer in the presence of mythological beasts that have Dionysian affiliations. Early in this century Josef Strzygowski published a textile from a private collection in Moscow (PLATE 2a) with an image of Orpheus that is very close to that on the Dumbarton Oaks example.¹³ In each the figure of Orpheus sits frontally on a throne-like stool and wears oriental costume: the long himation, sleeved jacket, and tall Phrygian cap. The field around Orpheus in the Moscow textile is more crowded with animals, but Strzygowski notes the presence of a centaur, this time equipped with a club, on the left near Orpheus' shoulder. More clear is the figure on Pan in the upper right quadrant, facing inward and holding his syrinx. Like the centaur whose form he balances, Pan is one of those frequent participants in Dionysian *thiasoi* (Nonnus *Dion.* 14.67–95, 27.30f) and again calls to mind the impending destruction of the singer by the power of the god against whom his song is ineffectual. A third textile once in a New York private collection (present location unknown) and reportedly from Egypt provides another variation, but to the same effect. Here, in addition to the animals, Orpheus is flanked by a pair of satyrs, perhaps the most obvious of Dionysian creatures.¹⁴

A final example, in the Victoria and Albert Museum (PLATE 2b), like the others lacks a controlled archaeological context, but is reported to belong among a body of textiles removed from a

¹² See Picard (*supra* n.7) 818.

¹³ This discussion of the textile relies on the photograph and description in J. Strzygowski, "Das neugefundene Orpheus-Mosaik in Jerusalem," *ZDPV* 24 (1901) 147f. Strzygowski reports that the textile came from Egypt, but gives no further archaeological context. In 1901 the textile formed part of the collection of W. de Bock; at least part of the de Bock collection apparently went to the Pushkin Museum: see R. Shurinova, *Coptic Textiles: Collection of Coptic Textiles: State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow* (Moscow 1967) 19. In correspondence with the museum, however, I have not been able to discover the textile's present location.

¹⁴ Walters Art Gallery, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (Baltimore 1947) no. 806. The textile was at the time of this exhibition in the collection of Dikran G. Kelekian. Its present location is unknown.

cemetery at Akhmim.¹⁵ The allusion to the destruction of Orpheus by Dionysus occurs again, but with additional iconographic elements providing clarification for the context within which the subject is presented. The basic compositional pattern repeats that of the preceding examples, with Orpheus seated on a low, cushioned stool and surrounded by the enchanted animals. But here Orpheus is not the rigid, frontal figure of the Dumbarton Oaks (PLATE 1) and Moscow (PLATE 2a) examples; rather, he sits in three-quarters view, with legs crossed, the right sharply bent up, the left straight, a pose whose spatial complexity and suggestion of incipient movement harken back to Hellenistic philosopher portraits. His dress, too, is more simple than the oriental fashions seen before, boots and a short cloak, a kind of garb befitting his Thracian origin.

The issue of prevailing power is given special emphasis in this textile by altering the straightforward description of Orpheus singing to the gathered animals. In a distinctive but highly artificial gesture, Orpheus holds the lyre out away from his body to the left in his right hand, the hand normally used to strike the strings in accompaniment to his song. Rather than residing in song, his power over the animals projects magically and directly from the lyre, which occupies the center of the circular medallion rather than the figure of Orpheus, who has been shifted slightly to the right.

Inhabiting the ground between the form of Orpheus and the right border is a figure of Pan. Though smaller in scale than Orpheus he clearly mimics him in dress and pose: he wears the same boots and short cloak, sits with his left leg extended and his right leg bent, and hold his syrinx out away from his body to the left. The similarities between the two set up the contrast in the instruments they pointedly hold forward. Although Pan's syrinx, like Orpheus' lyre, could charm, it is repeatedly associated in Classical texts with wild nature, and inferior to the more civilized sound of stringed instruments like the lyre. The contrast between these stringed and wind instruments finds its most familiar mythological expression in the contest between Apollo and Marsyas.¹⁶

¹⁵ A. F. Kendrick, *Catalogue of Textiles from Burying-Grounds in Egypt I* (London 1920) 9, 59f (no. 42).

¹⁶ On the wild nature of the syrinx and other wind instruments, see Pl. *Resp.* 399Df, Aristid. Quint. 2.4; for discussion see A. J. Festugière, "L'âme et la musique," *TAPA* 85 (1954) 77; for the charming powers of Pan's syrinx, see P.

The close parallel between the poses and garb of Orpheus and Pan point up their one conspicuous divergence. Pan, unlike virtually all the animals around Orpheus, looks not in towards the singer acknowledging his power, but out of the composition to the right. In leading the viewer's attention outside the context of the immediate scene, Pan's glance also draws attention to the arrival of those who are not yet seen, the frenzied followers of Dionysus, and the resulting destruction of Orpheus. Thus despite the variations in the details of the renderings between the Dumbarton Oaks and Moscow examples on the one hand and the London example on the other, the textiles as a group present Orpheus as a warning of a power that fails to triumph over death.

The London textile contains a further iconographic feature of importance: distributed among the animals are three putti (upper and lower left quadrants and directly below Orpheus). At first glance these putti seem as incongruous for this story as do the centaurs, satyrs, and Pans of the other examples. These are figures familiar from nilotic scenes, and they personify the metrical markings on nilometers, stone structures erected to record the height reached by the Nile in its annual flood, and by extension the promise of the year's agricultural bounty.¹⁷ These putti are typically associated with scenes of the inundation or with personifications of the Nile and Euthenia (Abundance), but in the case of a textile in the Brooklyn Museum, three such putti accompany a figure of Pan. One scholar has recognized a Dionysian theme in this particular grouping, a suggestion entirely in keeping with the reading of the Orpheus textiles proposed here.¹⁸ But these putti also bring with them a wealth of

Borgeaud, *The Cult of Pan in Ancient Greece*, tr. K. Atlass and J. Redfield (Chicago 1988) 117f.

¹⁷ R. Pfister, "Nil, nilomètres et l'orientalisation du paysage hellénistique," *RArtsAs* 7 (1931-32) 121-40; A. Hermann, "Die Ankunft des Nils," *ZAeS* 85 (1960) 35-42, with discussion of the usual renderings of these putti.

¹⁸ Brooklyn 15.462. On the Dionysian interpretation see D. Thompson, *Coptic Textiles in the Brooklyn Museum* (Brooklyn 1971) 36. A combination of motifs similar to the London textile is found also on a textile in Berlin, where a mantle is decorated with separate figures of a putto, Pan, a dancer, and a lyre player. The last may be Orpheus; the Pan and dancer are certainly Dionysian. See O. Wulff and W. F. Volbach, *Spätantike und koptische Stoffe aus ägyptischen Grabsunden in den Staatlichen Museen* (Berlin 1926) 19 no. 9250.

associations upon which the London textile draws. Like the Nile, Dionysus is a source of agricultural plenty and rebirth. Thus while Orpheus' power is helpless to overcome death (either his own or Eurydice's), Dionysus' power is seen as ineluctable and of greater promise against death.

Pan, as a harbinger of Dionysus, expresses the contrast with Orpheus in terms of contrasting musical instruments (syrinx vs lyre). The putti, too, are creatures associated with music; they appear in processional celebrations of the Nile inundation that are marked by musical accompaniment. In fitting contrast with Orpheus' lyre, however, their instruments of choice are normally wind or percussion. On the Brooklyn textile one has appropriated Pan's syrinx, while Philostratus (*Imag.* 1.5) has them play on sistra. A pun may be at work on the London textile as well: the Greek word for these personified units of measure, πῆχυς, is used in the plural (πήχεις) is the term used for the vertical supports of a lyre, which is given such prominent display.

Read at face value, the putti may evoke the sense of a bankside setting, a fitting place for Orpheus to mourn the loss of Eurydice, for she died from the bite of a snake encountered along a river bank (Verg. *G.* 4.456). No extant variation of the Orpheus legend places the action in Egypt along the Nile. But despite the removal of these putti from their normal environment, their watery associations generally and nilotic associations specifically remain pertinent, as emphasized by the putto (lower right quadrant) holding a waterfowl cradled in his lap. In publishing a mosaic rendering of Orpheus charming the animals from Blanzky-lès-Fismes, Henri Stern (*supra* n.6: 65f) accounted for the frequent use of this subject for fountain decorations by the power of this bucolic scene of music making to offer a poetic equivalent for the aural experience of cool and shaded water sources. This association of Orpheus' singing with babbling water also informs each of the other Orpheus textiles, albeit more obliquely. In both the Dumbarton Oaks and New

York textiles, sea creatures enframe the scene;¹⁹ the Moscow textile is bordered with a stylized wave pattern.²⁰

The specifically nilotic allusion of the London textile buttresses the funerary associations the subject often carries.²¹ The inundation of the Nile to which the putti refer is an occasion of regeneration from death. And since the time of the Old Kingdom *Pyramid Texts* the Nile had been identified with Osiris, the god who dies and is reborn. This identity, which stands at the center of Egyptian ritual and belief about death and life after death, has an impressive life of its own, enduring for over two millennia. At the end of the Roman period inscriptions still ask that the dead be granted the cool waters of Osiris.²² Whatever the religious predilections of the owner of the London textile, the association of the Nile's waters with ideas of death and rebirth would be an easy and familiar one.

The narrative context of Orpheus' failure to defeat death, contrasted with the triumphant power of Dionysus, and the funerary context for which there is archaeological evidence at least for the London textile suggest that the textiles under discussion form a group held together by a common iconography and their cautionary evocation of the dangers of false promises of salvation. Renderings of Orpheus among the animals infiltrated by members of Dionysus' thiasos are not

¹⁹ These creatures of the sea may also carry Dionysian overtones. Depictions of Dionysus frequently employ sea creatures as framing elements, perhaps an allusion to the god's triumphs at sea over the Indians or the Tyrrhenian pirates: see Lenzen (*supra* n.7) 13f; Nonnus *Dion.* 44.248. The creatures on the Dumbarton Oaks textile, though quite toothy, may be dolphins; compare the similar rendering of dolphins as framing elements above and below the triumphant Dionysus from Acholla (Picard *supra* n.7).

²⁰ Similarly, it has been argued that a wave pattern framed the interior of the shield of Pheidias' statue of Athena Parthenos and referred to the river of the ocean: E. B. Harrison, "Motifs of City-Siege on the Shield of Athena Parthenos," *AJA* 85 (1981) 304.

²¹ See Stern (*supra* n.6) 67 and the tomb of El-Amrouni (*supra* n.11).

²² On the Roman funerary inscriptions and their continuation of ancient Egyptian ideas of death and resurrection, see D. Delia, "The Refreshing Waters of Osiris," *JARCE* 29 (1992) 181-90; for specific reference to the ancient Egyptian equation of the Nile and Osiris, Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 364A-366D; on the rôle of Graeco-Roman as well as ancient Egyptian iconography and formal elements in defining Coptic visual art, see G. Egger, "Bemerkungen zur koptischen Ikonographie," *Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte und Archäologie des Frühmittelalters (=Akten zum VII. Internationalen Kongress für Frühmittelalterforschung [Graz 1962])* 37-43.

common in Late Antique art, and works with this particular iconography tend to support the evidence of the textiles that the popularity of this handling of the subject was peculiar to Egypt. A fragmentary relief pediment from the modern Egyptian town of Mallawi preserves not Orpheus but his lyre, a selection of animals, and a Pan.²³ The structure that this pediment once decorated is unidentified, though the relatively small scale, the relief format, and the subject all make a tomb structure a possibility. A pair of ivory pyxides share the Egyptian pattern of referring to the Dionysian thiasos, with an even more emphatic use of multiple Dionysian figures. On a pyxis in Bobbio a centaur and Pan join the gathering of animals; and on a pyxis in Florence these two creatures are joined further by a pair of sileni. On both vessels, Orpheus wears the same Oriental garb as on the Dumbarton Oaks and Moscow textiles. Although both pyxides are now in Italy, an Eastern Mediterranean provenance has been proposed for at least the example in Florence;²⁴ the Egyptian character of the iconography of the subject now supports this proposal for both.

It will have become apparent at this point in the discussion that the focus on an iconographic pattern that occurs in small-scale objects of Egyptian manufacture will provide a frame of reference for the one larger and much discussed work that shares this iconography, the mosaic flooring from a building in Jerusalem identified as a Christian funeral oratory.²⁵ Orpheus here is presented frontally, as on the Dumbarton Oaks and Moscow textiles, and in oriental costume. Beneath him, and on

²³ Strzygowski recognized the significance of the pediment's iconography for the textile rendering of the subject: cf. *supra* n.153 148 and "Hellenistische und koptische Kunst in Alexandria," *BSRAA* 5 (1902) 50.

²⁴ W. F. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters*³ (Mainz 1976) 70f nos. 91f: K Weitzmann, ed., *The Age of Spirituality* (New York 1979) 182f no. 161. Only two other Late Antique renderings of the subject with Dionysian elements are known to me: one in glass paste from Aquileia, the other an intaglio in Belgrad from an unknown location in Serbia. Stern (*supra* n.2) 162f identifies a centaur among the animals on each (with some uncertainty for the Belgrad intaglio).

²⁵ H. Vincent, "Une mosaïque byzantine à Jérusalem," *RBibl* 10 (1910) 436-44; the mosaic is now in Istanbul. Scholarly discussion has been spirited; see generally the bibliography cited *supra* n.2; Strzygowski (*supra* n.13); P. B. Bagatti, "Il mosaico dell' Orfeo a Gerusalemme," *RAChrist* 28 (1952) 145-60; Friedman (*supra* n.1); and A. Ovadia and S. Mucznik, "Orpheus from Jerusalem—Pagan or Christian Image?" in L. I. Levine, ed., *The Jerusalem Cathedral* I (Jerusalem 1981) 152-66.

a larger scale than the other accompanying animals, are a centaur and Pan. The absence of these members of the Dionysian thiasos from other of the numerous mosaic renderings of the subject, and the proximity of the building to Egypt, where a distinct tradition for the treatment of that subject prevailed, make it likely that the designer of the mosaic was familiar with that Egyptian tradition.²⁶ The larger scale and prominent positioning of the centaur and Pan at the bottom of the composition reflect the designer's understanding that these creatures are not simply two more wild animals subdued by Orpheus' song, but that they intimate the arrival of the Dionysian thiasos and Orpheus' death. It is likely, then, that even in this overtly Christian context the same view of Orpheus prevails: a warning that the power of his song, though it can still the animals, fails to defeat death. The funereal function of the design sets it against most other Orpheus mosaics, but corresponds with the predominant concern of the Egyptian examples. For this particular Christian adoption of the pagan Orpheus subject the same negative and essentially cautionary tone should apply.

The group of small-scale objects of Egyptian manufacture represented by the Dumbarton Oaks textile embodies a handling of the subject of Orpheus among the animals that continues a tradition familiar from literature: while describing the power of his song, it also records the failure of that power against death. The preservation of this tradition likely reflects a complex of factors: an educated clientele for these textiles, familiarity with the literary tradition; the durability of local visual traditions for both Dionysian and nilotic imagery; and the funereal context that seems to apply. That this special iconography for the subject is largely restricted to objects from Egypt or nearby, as with the Jerusalem mosaic, suggests that the conditions necessary for promoting this handling of the subject were peculiarly met in the population of this region.

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²⁶ Strzygowski (*supra* n.13) was the first to cite examples from Egypt as parallels for the presence of the centaur and Pan in the Jerusalem mosaic, but without proposing that they provide an insight into the handling of the subject.