



The Pharmakos

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COLLECTANEA.

THE PHARMAKOS.

YEARS ago I began to wonder why the Greek scapegoat or outcast of the festival of the Thargelia was called a Pharmakos. I could not understand what connection there could be between the Greek words *φάρμακον* and *φαρμακεύω* and the scapegoat that many have called the Human Medicine. However, the matter passed out of my mind till I got a copy of the second edition of *The Rise of the Greek Epic*, and there Professor Murray's remarks in Appendix A brought the matter back to me. Professor Murray seemed to believe it was probably a foreign word, and, noting the long *A* in the Ionic, suggested that in Attic the *A* was short from analogy with *φάρμακον*. This seemed to imply that he regarded *Pharmakos*, the scapegoat, as differently derived from *φάρμακον*, the drug. Nevertheless, on page 34 of the *Greek Epic* he speaks of the *Pharmakos* as Human Medicine, which to my mind is a very late interpretation of the word. It certainly is a difficult problem to connect *Pharmakos* with a word for a drug or a man who used a drug, a pharmacist or physician. But following the clue which suggested a foreign origin, I sought for some other word in the same area which might suggest where it came from. I now believe that the original word and the two original roots which make it up came from the Turkic family of speech. For there is to be found in the Turkic tongues what looks like the very word in various forms. In Turkish itself it is spelt *vourmak*, which means "to beat." In this word *vour* is the root, which means "beat," and *mak* or, rather, *mag*, is the original root, both in the Turkic and Aryan families, which means "make." That *mak* is common to these two groups seems tolerably certain, though how

it came to be in both nobody knows. We certainly cannot connect the Turkic with the Aryan group, and yet the root *mak* is very widely spread. Thus *yourmak* means literally "to make blows" or "to whip." It is odd that it is seldom employed in any Turkic tongue to mean beating with a stick or whip. In that case the root *dyon* is more commonly used. When we remember that in the Greek Ritual the *Pharmakos* was beaten with agnus castus, with squills and other flowers, that must have some significance. We may note that *yourmak*, "to beat," may just as often have the termination *mak* when the Turkish laws of euphony demand it. One of the Turkish substantival gerunds of *yourmak* is *vourour* or *vürür*, which seems to be, curiously enough, the exact philological equivalent of the Latin *verber*, a thong or whip, which is apparently an oddly reduplicated form. From this it seems the real meaning of *Pharmakos* is just a beaten or whipped person, and at last, by a later process of semantics, one who has been driven out with blows. Whether one is justified in bringing in Latin in this case is a matter of question, but it is certainly interesting to note that the reduplicated root in *verber* and *verberare* and in *verbero* (one who deserves a flogging) has in some ways a look as if it did not belong to the Latin tongue, but was an importation as in the Greek. It is certainly suggestive of the root *vour* or *phar*. I note in the old *Etymologicon* of Voss he says as regards *verbera*, "sed cum Salmasio dicamus *verber* esse ab aeolico βερβύρ pro δερβύρ." Of course, no stress can be laid on this or on Voss. An interesting analogy is also to be found in the Greek *μαστιγίας*, a scoundrel.

According to this view, *φαρμακεύω*, "I give drugs or poisons," is, of course, from the same roots. Probably in the earliest times it implied an early medicine man, a Shaman, something equivalent to those found with all their ritual among the Africans and Central Asians. Thus *φαρμακεύειν* means, as it would with early races, "to drive out evil spirits with a whip, or with blows." Such a connotation is, on my theory, earlier than "to give poisons," but one knows that the ritual of the savage cure largely consists in driving out the spirit of disease or witchcraft by noisy incantations or by actual physical ill-usage of the patient. If I am right, it is curious to consider that our word "pharmacist" has for its

early meaning exactly that of the ancient medicine man or exorcist.

There is another interesting point connected with *Pharmakos* which I have not seen mentioned. All over the East the word *farmaçion* is used with the meaning of an outlaw, and quite commonly with that of a cunning blood-drinking enemy of religion, a man who is a satanist or devil-worshipper. Of course, by a sort of meiosis it seems sometimes to mean a mere scoundrel, just in the same way as the almost equally interesting word *epikouros* is used in Northern Africa, where this verbal descendant of the name of the great philosopher has come to mean an enemy of religion, a Christian, and an Atheist or a scoundrel. This is somewhat on a par with the use of the word "Atheist" for the Christians at the time of Julian the Apostate. There does not seem to me any doubt whatever that *farmaçion* is actually the same word as *Pharmakos*. It is used in Turkey and Asia Minor and as far east as Afghanistan. It may be that the ancestors of the Greeks borrowed it originally from some Turkic race and returned it again to the Mahomedans with a fuller connotation.

Oddly enough, the word *farmaçion* has, since its readoption by Eastern races, taken on a new meaning. It now often means "a freemason," one who is looked upon by the orthodox as an outcast and a scoundrel, a sufi and one highly irreligious. Not being a freemason myself, I know nothing of its ritual, but, so far as I can learn, members of this society, or those who are really instructed in its ritual and doctrines, regard their common name as one very uncertain in its etymology. Its present or common meaning is undoubtedly false philology. Our word freemason is, of course, a translation from the French franc-maçon, but to my mind "franc" is nothing but a metathesized form of the *vour* of *vourmak* and the *phar* of *Pharmakos* with an added euphonic nasal. Thus, it is only by a later verbal accident that the "maçon" was turned into "mason," and connected with masonry and building. Probably, then, it is actually the same root as the *mak* of *vourmak* or *farmaçion*. I do not see much chance of connecting the original word mason, or Latin *maceria*, with the root *mak*, although there may possibly be some connection. The early societies and secret orders of the East (the East, as

might be expected, being full of secret orders) have linked themselves on to masonry as the last surviving order which used their secret marks. Probably, to begin with, these marks had no relation to building. It seems then that etymologically the free-masons are no more than a band of "pharmakoi."

To go back to the actual *Pharmakos*, one may note that Professor Murray is strongly of opinion that he was never killed, but only beaten. This is certainly borne out by my suggested etymology, although, of course, the very word *Pharmakos* may only have come into use when the ritual had been modified and humanized. It is interesting to note that there are two small islands off the coast of Attica, not far from Salamis and in the Bay of Eleusis, which were known in classical times as *Pharmacussae*. On one of them used to be shown the Temple of Circe. There is another island on the coast of Asia Minor called *Pharmacusa*, where, according to Plutarch, Caesar was taken prisoner by pirates when he was a young man. I cannot help thinking that in both cases these islands might practically be translated into English as Outcast Island or Islands. That is to say, they were originally refuges for wandering scoundrels, pirates and the like, those who harried the settled mainland, and were looked upon as the Britons looked upon the Danes, and as the mainlanders looked upon some of the islanders at the time of the Migrations of which Professor Murray gives such an imaginative picture. There also is another island in the Bay of Iassus which is, I believe, still called *Farmako*. It is possible, of course, that such a name sprang from the fact that these islands were inhabited by survivors of the primitive tribes who were always apt to be looked upon as magicians.

Naturally enough, during the course of time there have been many attempts to discover the root meaning of *Pharmakos*, and I cannot help thinking that some of the later attempts are little better than those of the scholiast and grammarians. For instance, Eustathius derives *pharmakon* from *φέρειν ἄχθος* when used in a bad sense, and from *φέρειν ἄκος* when used in a good one. One does not always, even nowadays, get much help from those who ought to know. When my theory was submitted to one well-known Orientalist he said that the older or classical form of

vourmak was *ourmak*. He was, of course, wrong. He was an authority on the Semitic language, but evidently knew little of Turkish. It is impossible to speak of it as an old form when all existing Turkish documents, being in the Arabian character, must necessarily be subsequent to the eighth century, when the Turks of the Khanates were endowed simultaneously with Islam and the Persi-Arabic alphabet. Nor do I understand how he could have thought *ourmak* could have been degraded into the popular form *vourmak*. According to all philologic knowledge, any degradation would have been in the opposite direction. It may be noted that as there is no Arabic character to represent the *v* sound the Turks use the *waw* for this purpose. There are, in fact, hundreds of words in Turkish beginning with a *v* sound and thousands in which the *v* is incorporated. They are all represented by the Arabic *waw*.

In this paper I have not troubled to speak about the actual meaning of the *Pharmakos* ceremony. Professor Murray seems wedded to the belief that it was in every case a *mimema*. On the other hand, Sir James Frazer is equally certain that even in civilized Greece the Thargelian rites took darker forms than the mere expulsion of this quasi-religious outcast when he was beaten with agnus castus or squills and expelled from the city. Certainly, the derivation which I offer seems on the surface to support Professor Murray's contention. But the general body of anthropological lore on this subject points steadily to darker customs which may have been resurrected in classical Greece during the times of abnormal wrath on the part of the gods or in times of scarcity, if the *Pharmakos* represented, as he often must have done, the spirit of winter.

It would, of course, be interesting to get some early references to the use of *farmaçion*, but it is very difficult to trace any Oriental expression before mediaeval times. One has to remember that using the pen was, in its way, a solemn rite. Up to the tenth century every sheet of writing was headed among the Mahomedans, "In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate and Most Merciful"; and is still in all literary work. An Orientalist friend of mine to whom I have referred asks, "How, with such a headline, would a pious scribe dare to refer to a blood-drinking

satanic *farmación*? Such a combination might have made some dreadful formula capable of shooting the writer into the infinities of the n^{th} dimension of space." Such an attitude of mind is especially characteristic of the Oriental. Although magic was utterly condemned by Mahomet, it was believed in none the less because he condemned it as a practice, and it is still believed in. My friend tells me that the word has been used for a long time in the traditional comments on a portion of the ritual of a secret society into which he was initiated in an obscure town on the Tigris. The actual early papyrus was totally indecipherable and belonged to no known language. Indeed, those who held these documents, which had probably been transcribed many times by men who did not understand the script, were of the romantic opinion that the original was to be referred to the era of Khamurabi, although the comments were probably not older than the eighth century. Of course, such a statement as this is not evidence without further support. And yet, if the derivation of *Pharmakos* is what I have suggested, the use of the word probably goes back beyond all historic times. Certainly *farmación* must be a very ancient word, and the horror of the orthodox Islamite for it is natural enough. We may compare the Catholic Church and its views of Freemasonry. There were political reasons for this, but the Church has a deep-seated jealousy and dislike and even fear of secret societies.

While considering this subject I have come across some who actually declared that we might start the history of the word from *Odyssey* ix. 393. That is certainly of to-day compared with its real history, for even Hipponax of the sixth century B.C. had to explain it. And when this passage in the *Odyssey* uses *φαρμάσσειν* in the sense of to "temper," how is it possible for us to look on mere tempering as a primitive meaning when we know what we do of the whole body of Wayland Smith legends? A smith was always a magician in the old times. Of course, the scholiast interprets the word in this passage as "hardening." As a matter of fact, it was probably "curing." What a magic sorcerer or smith did was to cure the iron of its native softness and bewitch it, almost certainly with incantations and ritual, as he plunged it into the tempering medium. We might even say that he drove out the devil of softness.

Wherever there is an element of magic in a word one expects that to be primary. The expression *φαρμάσσειν χαλκόν*, "to temper or strengthen brass," cannot be primary. One needs some imagination to deal with words like this. One of the weaknesses of the common dictionary is its habit of putting the usually accepted meaning first and the original meaning afterwards. So, when one looks at Liddell and Scott one sees *φαρμάσσειν* means, to begin with, "to medicate," and secondly, "to enchant or bewitch by the use of potions." The word certainly goes back to the ages of magic ritual, and back again to the very expulsion of Jonahs, people who had no luck and brought ill luck, probably before magic itself was practised. It is a natural animal instinct to turn out those who seem to bring ill fortune, even if there is no piacular element in such an expulsion. Even animals expel some of their kind. We may compare rooks and elephants and even cattle, who kill a wounded member of the herd who by his loud lowing might possibly bring them into danger.

Of course, it is exceedingly hard to say, when we consider what a linguistic whirlpool Asia Minor has always been, what was the actual origin of this particular word. It might not originally be Turkic. There is a strange tendency among certain people to attribute everything unknown to the Hittites, but, as no one seems to know what Hittite is, that is very little use to the investigator. *Vourmak* may not, of course, be Turkic at all, although it is a living word in the living Turkish language at the present time.

MORLEY ROBERTS.

BURIAL FACE DOWNWARDS TO PREVENT THE RETURN OF THE GHOST.

A correspondent of *The Times*, 29th July, 1915, writes from British Headquarters at the Front:

"A few days since, when searching for facts concerning a recent attack on a German trench, we came upon the grave of a German soldier, only just then filled up. The man had died instantly of a bayonet thrust. 'A curious thing about that,' commented an officer. 'The German was a huge, scowling man, and