

- (12) [Zeus . . . swallowed the power] of the phallus of the first-born king. And in him all immortal blessed gods and goddesses were joined and rivers and lovely springs and everything else which had come to be; and he became the only one.
- (13) Now he is king of all and will be everafter.
- (14) Zeus became the first, Zeus last, god of the shining bolt. Zeus head, Zeus middle, Zeus is formed from all things, Zeus breath of all, Zeus is destiny of all, Zeus king, Zeus lord of all, god of the shining bolt.
- (15) Zeus engendered through ejaculation Persuasion and Harmony and heavenly Aphrodite, and he contrived Earth and broad Heaven above,
- (16) and he contrived the great might of broad-flowing Ocean and he placed therein the sinews of silver-eddying Achelous, from whom all seas [ . . . ]
- (17) in the middle the (moon) of equal measure everywhere, which is manifested to many mortals over the immense earth.
- (18) But when the mind of Zeus had conceived all the works, he wanted to unite in love with his own mother.

### 1.8. SHORT COSMOGONY IN APOLLONIOS OF RHODES' ARGONAUTIKA

Apollonios was a poet and librarian in Alexandria (Egypt) in the third century BCE (known as *Rhodos*, “of Rhodes,” because he spent part of his life on that island). His poem the *Argonautika* is the only epic poem preserved from Hellenistic times. The poem relates the story of Jason and the Argonauts, focusing on their quest for the Golden Fleece and the love story between Jason and Medea (see summary of the full story in Part 3, document 11). In book one, Orpheus (the legendary poet and enchanter, who accompanied the Argonauts) sings the following cosmogony. His singing is intended to calm down his comrades who were engaged in a heated argument. After Orpheus sings, they are pacified and spellbound, and they turn to offering proper libations to Zeus and go to sleep peacefully. The dramatic context sheds light on the soothing qualities imparted by the recitation or singing of epic poetry, and especially the enchanting effect of cosmogonies, which turns the mind to dwell on mysterious events at the beginning of time. The cosmogony itself is rather eclectic and seems to combine elements akin to Hesiodic, Empedoclean, Orphic, and Egyptian traditions.

SOURCE: Apollonios of Rhodes, *Argonautika* 1.493–515.

Translated by C. López-Ruiz.

( . . . ) And it would have turned into a quarrel, had their comrades, and the son of Aison himself (Jason), not restrained them

- (495) by calling on the contenders, and had Orpheus, holding the lyre in his left hand, not begun singing. He sang how the earth, the sky, and the sea, at first joined to one another in a single body, were separated from each other on two sides, as the result of a terrible quarrel; and how in heaven the stars have a fixed course forever,
- (500) as do the moon and the paths of the sun; and how the mountains sprang up, and how the resounding rivers with their nymphs and all creeping creatures came into being. And he sang how at first Ophion and Ocean's daughter Eurynome held the power over snowy Olympos,
- (505) and how, through strength of arms, the one yielded his prerogative to Kronos, and the other to Rhea, and then they both sank under the Ocean's waves; and these two in the meantime ruled over the blessed Titan gods, while Zeus, still a lad, still with childish thoughts in his mind, dwelled under the Diktean cave; and the earthborn
- (510) Cyclopes had not yet strengthened him with the thunderbolt, with thunder and lightning, for these bring glory to Zeus. So he said, and he stopped his lyre together with his immortal voice; but they, even though he had ceased, still eagerly bent their heads forward, all at once with upright ears, keeping quiet
- (515) under a spell; such an enchantment of a song he had left them.

## PHOENICIAN

### 1.9. PHOENICIAN COSMOGONIES

The Phoenicians were a Semitic people of Canaanite origin from the area that roughly approximates the modern countries of Lebanon and northern Israel. Although they had a long and deeply influential presence in the Mediterranean, with colonies throughout northern Africa, Sicily, Sardinia, Spain, and Portugal (the most famous being Gadir and Carthage), we have very few Phoenician literary sources. They played a crucial role in transmitting to Greek culture both technologies (e.g., the alphabet) and mythological themes from the broader Near Eastern milieu. In contrast to the increasing archaeological information we have about them, their own literature has completely disappeared except for traces glimpsed through the lens of classical authors. Their history is also reconstructed from classical, Near Eastern, and biblical allusions, while the abundant Phoenician epigraphical evidence offers little historical and mythological information.

#### 1.9.a. Philon of Byblos: Excerpts from the *Phoenician History*

This document contains a fragment of one of the few works by a Phoenician to have come down to us. Philon of Byblos was a scholar and antiquarian who lived during the early Roman Empire (ca. 64–141 CE). He wrote in Greek, as was usual in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. However, he claimed to be

transmitting a Phoenician theogony originally written by one Sanchouniathon over a thousand years before his time. His approach was to transform these myths into a historical account in which the gods were but ancient kings and inventors who were later divinized. This is called a **Euhemeristic** approach (after Euhemerus, a scholar active at the Macedonian court at the late fourth to early third centuries BCE, that is, the early Hellenistic Period). Unfortunately, of his many works, the only substantial excerpts to survive are quotations from the beginning of his *Phoenician History*, quoted by the Christian bishop Eusebios of Caesarea (ca. 300 CE) in his *Praeparatio Evangelica*. He, in turn, was quoting the third-century CE Neoplatonic scholar Porphyry of Tyre, who dealt with Philon's writings in his works about philosophy and the history of religions.

The narrative of Philon was for long considered a mere reelaboration on Greek motifs with little genuine claims of antiquity or Phoenician authenticity. However, thanks to the discovery of Ugaritic texts from Late Bronze Age Syria, scholars now believe that Philon is basing at least part of his information on Phoenician archives and possibly earlier Canaanite traditions preserved in his own time. Names such as Sanchouniathon, Dagon, Demarous, Adodos, and Baitylos are of Semitic origin. For instance, some appear in the Ugaritic epics, such as Demarous (Ugaritic Dimaranu or the like); Kronos, equated with Elos by Philon, is clearly the heir of the Canaanite god El (or Ilu in Ugaritic), head of the Canaanite pantheon; and the role of Pontos (the Sea) as cosmic enemy in the narrative is parallel with that of Yamm (Sea) in the Ugaritic *Baal Cycle*. Finally, the arrangement of the pantheon at the end of the cited passage implies that despite the cosmic fights, Elos/Kronos maintains his place as patriarchal leader of the gods, much as El/Ilu does in the Ugaritic epics (see *Baal Cycle* and *Aqhat Epic* in Part 3, documents 5.a and 5.b).

Yet with the castration of Ouranos (Sky) by Kronos and other allusions, Philon aligns his mythology with the Hesiodic tradition (which he sees as dependent on the Canaanite and not the reverse). Conscious of his "bicultural" stand, he draws constant equivalences (we call this *interpretatio*) between Greek and Semitic gods. In turn, other aspects of his narrative reveal influences from Presocratic natural philosophy and later schools of thought, intertwined in a crowded account that combines elements assimilated over the centuries in the Eastern Mediterranean "melting pot." The motif of the "first inventors" (*protoi beuretai*) also occupies a good part of his account.

Finally, Phoenician cosmogonies seem to have shared basic concepts with Orphic ones, most remarkably the idea of a cosmic egg but also the mention of Time (here as Aion, "eternal time") and Protogonos, "First Born." The latter was the name some Orphic cosmogonies gave to Phanes ("The Shining One"), a divinity said to be born from the cosmic egg, which in turn was made by Time (Chronos—not to be confused with Kronos).

SOURCE: A. Kaldellis and C. López-Ruiz, *BNJ-FGrH 790*, Philon of Byblos, *Phoenician History* (P. E. 1.10.1-31), modified.

(*Cosmogonic section*)

(1) He (Philon) posits as the source of all things a dark and windy air or a gust of dark air and a foul and nether chaos.<sup>65</sup> These things were limitless and, for a long eon, had no boundary. He says, "But when the wind conceived an erotic desire for its own sources and a mixing together took place, that intertwining was called Desire (Pothos). And this was the source for the creation of all things. It itself was not aware of its own creation. And from his entwining with the wind Mot came into being. (2) Some say that this is mud, others the putrefaction of the liquid mixture. And from this mixture came all the sowing of creation and the birth of all things. There were animals with no sensation, from which came animals with intelligence. And they were called Zophasemin, which means 'observers of the heavens.' And they had the shape of an egg.<sup>66</sup> And Mot shone forth and the sun and the moon and the stars and the luminous bodies and the great stars." (3) Such was their cosmogony, outright introducing atheism.

Let us read what follows, what he says about the creation of animals. He says, (4) "And when the air was filled with light through the heating of both the sea and the earth, there came about winds and clouds and the greatest downpourings of the heavenly waters and floods. And then they parted and were removed from their proper place by the burning heat of the sun, and when all of them had mingled again in the air and collided there was thunder and lightning. And the crash of thunder awoke the intelligent animals that were mentioned before, and they were alarmed because of the noise and so then the male and the female began to move across the land and in the sea. (5) Such was their account of the generation of animals." To this the same author [i.e., Philon] adds that "these were found written in the cosmogony of Tautos<sup>67</sup> and his commentaries, which were based on conjectures and evidence, which his intellect perceived and illuminated for us."

(*History of culture—first inventors*)

(6) After this he states the names of the winds, the South wind, the North, and the rest, and adds: "But they were the first to dedicate what sprouted from the earth, and regarded them as gods, and worshipped them, things from which both they and their descendants and all their ancestors were sustained. And they made libations and offered incense. [They believed that pity and compassion and lamentation were appropriate for vegetation that separated itself from the earth and for the first generation of animals from the earth as well as their birth from each other, and their death, when they departed from life.]" (7) And he adds: "Such, then, were their notions regarding worship, corresponding to their weakness and the lack of spiritual daring of that time."

<sup>65</sup> The "dark and windy air or gust" reminds one of the biblical *tohu-wa-bobu*, "formless void and darkness," while chaos is found first in Hesiod's *Theogony*. Air and ether also appear in Orphic cosmogonies and in Phoenician ones (see document 1.9.b).

<sup>66</sup> Scholars see here a reference to the "world egg" or cosmic egg of Orphic cosmogonies (an egg also appears in the Egyptian cosmogony of Hermopolis). Zophasemin is West Semitic *zophei-sbamaim*, "observers of heaven."

<sup>67</sup> Or Egyptian Thoth (*Tabawte* or *Djhwty*), associated with the art of writing and identified with Hermes in the Greek world (see note 71).

And then he says that from the Kolpias wind and his wife Baau—which he interprets as being the night—were born Aion and Protogonos (First-Born), who were mortal men called by these names. Aion discovered the food that grows on trees. Those born to these two he calls Genos and Generation, and they settled Phoenicia. But when there were droughts, they stretched their arms toward the heaven, to the sun. “For the latter,” he says, “they held to be the only god, the lord of heaven, calling him Beelsamen, which in Phoenician means lord of heaven, or Zeus among the Greeks.” (8) After these things he accuses the Greeks of error, saying, “It is not in vain that we have expounded on these things in different ways, because they relate to the later reception of the names that occur in these matters, which the Greeks, in their ignorance, have taken in a different way, misled by the ambiguity of translation.” (9) Next he says that “from Genos, the offspring of Aion and Protogonos, mortal children were born in turn, whose names are Light, Fire, and Flame. They,” he says, “discovered fire by rubbing sticks together and taught its use to others. They gave birth to sons who were great in size and stature, whose names were given to the mountains over which they ruled; thus were named Mts. Kassios, Libanos, the Anti-Libanos, and Brathy. From them,” he says, “were born Samemroumos, who is also called High-in-Heaven, [and Ousoos]. But,” he says, “they called themselves after their mothers, given that women at that time coupled freely with whomever they chanced upon.” (10) Then he says that “High-in-Heaven occupied Tyre, inventing huts from reeds, rushes, and papyrus. He rebelled against his brother Ousoos, who was the first to think of clothing his body using leather from animals that he managed to capture. When there was a downpour of rain and gusts of wind, the trees in Tyre rubbed against each other and caught fire, and their wood burned. Ousoos took a tree, trimmed it, and was the first to dare to sail on the sea. He dedicated two stelai to Fire and Wind, and worshipped them and made libations of blood to them from beasts he hunted. (11) And when these two died,” he says, “their descendants dedicated staves to them, and worshipped these staves, and held annual festivals in their honor.”<sup>68</sup>

“But many years later there were born to the family of High-in-Heaven Hunter and Fisherman, the inventors of fishing and hunting, after whom hunters and fishermen are named. From them were born two brothers, the discoverers of iron and its working. One of them, Chousor, devised formulae and spells and prophesies. This was Hephaistos, who also invented the hook, bait, line and raft, and was the first of men to set sail. Hence they honored him even as a god after his death. (12) He was also called Zeus Meilichios. Some say that his brothers invented walls made of bricks. After these things, two young men were born to this family, of whom one was called Craftsman, the other Earthly Native. They invented the method of mixing straw and clay to make bricks, and hardening them in the sun. But they also invented roofs. From them sprung others, of whom one was called Field, the other Field Hero or just Hunter, of whom there is in Phoenicia an arcane and highly revered statue as well as a temple drawn by a pair of oxen. Among the Byblians he is named the greatest of the gods. (13) These two conceived the notion of adding

<sup>68</sup> For a different and longer foundation story of Tyre, see the passage from Nonnos’ *Dionisiaka* in Part 4, document 13.

courtyards to houses as well as enclosures and dens. From them came hunters and those who hunt with dogs. They are also called Drifters and Titans. From them were born Amynos and Magos, who introduced villages and flocks. From them were born Misor and Sydyk, namely Supple and Just. They discovered the use of salt. (14) From Misor was born Tautos, who invented the first script for writing, whom the Egyptians call Thoyth, the Alexandrians Thoth, and the Greeks Hermes. From Sydyk were born the Dioskouroi, who are also the Kabeiroi, Korybantes, and Samothracians. They,” he says, “were the first to invent a boat. From them others were born, who discovered herbs and how to heal dangerous bites and spells.”

*(History of Kronos)*

“Around this time there lived a certain Elioun, also called Most High,<sup>69</sup> and a woman named Berouth, who settled in the area of Byblos. (15) From them was born Terrestrial Native, whom they later called Ouranos (Sky) and after him, on account of his surpassing beauty, the element up above us was named ‘heaven.’ A sister was born to him from the parents mentioned above, who was named Ge (Earth). And on account of her beauty,” he says, “the earth, which has the same name, was named after her. Their father, Most High, died in an encounter with wild beasts and was deified; his children offered libations and sacrifices to him. (16) Ouranos succeeded to his father’s rule and married his sister Earth, and begat from her four children: Elos, who is also Kronos, Baitylos, Dagon, who is also Grain,<sup>70</sup> and Atlas. And with other wives Ouranos produced numerous offspring. Hence Earth (Ge) was grieved and rebuked Ouranos in jealousy. As a result, they separated from each other. But even after Ouranos had left her he would violently approach and rape her at will, and then leave her again. He also tried to destroy his children by her, but Earth defended herself many times, making an alliance for her protection. And when Kronos became a man, he relied on Hermes Trismegistos<sup>71</sup> as a counselor and aid—for he was his secretary—and punished his father Ouranos in defense of his mother.”

(18) “The children of Kronos were Persephone and Athena.<sup>72</sup> The first died as a virgin. As for Athena, with her advice and that of Hermes, Kronos made a sickle and a spear. Then Hermes used words of magic on Kronos’ allies and instilled in them the desire to fight against Ouranos on behalf of Earth. And so Kronos waged war against Ouranos and drove him from power, succeeding him in the kingship. Ouranos’ lovely concubine, who was pregnant,<sup>73</sup> was captured in the battle, and

<sup>69</sup> Compare with Phoenician and Hebrew *Elyon*, “Most High” (e.g., Gen. 14.18). The Greek *hypsistos* was used as a cultic divine title in the Hellenistic period.

<sup>70</sup> The identification of El and Kronos appears in many ancient sources; Baitylos here is a god, not the sacred stone or baetyl, mentioned later in this selection; Dagon is a Semitic god of fertility and grain (cf. Hebrew *dagan*, “grain”).

<sup>71</sup> Hermes Trismegistos (“three-times-greatest”) became the authority for the later Hermetic esoteric movement. Here Hermes is again identified with Tautos (Thoth).

<sup>72</sup> The goddesses, especially Athena, reflect the attributes of Ugaritic Anat (see Part 3, document 5.b).

<sup>73</sup> Seemingly Earth (Ge), the wife mentioned.

Kronos gave her to be the wife of Dagon. (19) While with him she bore the child that Ouranos had sown and called him Demarous.”

“After these events, Kronos surrounded his own dwelling with a wall and founded the first city, Byblos in Phoenicia. (20) After these things, Kronos suspected his own brother Atlas, and on the advice of Hermes buried him deep in the earth. At this time the descendants of the Dioskouroi built rafts and ships and sailed away. They were cast ashore near Mt. Kassios, where they consecrated a temple. Now, the allies of Elos, that is of Kronos, were called Eloeim, just as those who were called after Kronos were the Kronians. (21) Kronos has a son, Sadidos, whom he killed with his own steel, as he regarded him with suspicion. He deprived him of life, becoming the killer of his own son. Likewise he decapitated his own daughter, so that all the gods were shocked by Kronos’ state of mind. (22) Time had passed when Ouranos, who was in exile, sent his maiden daughter Astarte along with two sisters of hers, Rhea and Dione, to kill Kronos through trickery. But Kronos captured them and made them, who were sisters, his lawful wives. (23) When Ouranos learned this he marshaled Fate and Season along with other allies against Kronos. But Kronos appropriated them too and kept them by his side. Moreover,” he says, “the god Ouranos invented **baetyls**, devising stones imbued with soul. Kronos had seven daughters with Astarte, the Titanids or Artemids. (24) And again to him with Rhea he had seven children, the youngest of whom was worshipped as soon as he was born. And with Dione he had . . . daughters, and with Astarte again he had two sons, Desire and Eros. (25) But Dagon discovered grain and plough, and was called Zeus Ploughman. One of the Titanids coupled with Sydyk the so-called Just and gave birth to Asklepios. (26) In addition, three sons were born to Kronos in Peraia: Kronos, who had the same name as his father, Zeus Belos, and Apollo. In that time there also lived Pontos (Sea), Typhon,<sup>74</sup> and Nereus, the father of Pontos and son of Belos. (27) To Pontos was born Sidon, who was the first to discover how to sing a hymn on account of the surpassing beauty of her voice, and Poseidon. To Demarous was born Melkathros, who is also Herakles.”<sup>75</sup>

(28) “And then Ouranos again wages war against Pontos and, withdrawing, allies with Demarous.<sup>76</sup> Demarous attacks Pontos, but Pontos routs him. Demarous vowed to offer a sacrifice for his escape.<sup>77</sup> (29) In the thirty-second year of his dominion and reign, Elos, that is Kronos, trapped his father Ouranos in an inland location and, having him in his power, castrated him in the vicinity of some springs and rivers. This is where Ouranos was deified and his spirit was finished. The blood of his genitals dripped into the springs and the waters of the rivers. And the place is

<sup>74</sup> See the role of Typhon/Typhoeus in Hesiod’s *Theogony* (document 1.5) and the *Hymn to Apollo* (Part 3, document 9); here the role of the monstrous divine enemy is taken by Pontos (see later in this selection).

<sup>75</sup> The identification of Herakles with the Phoenician god Melqart (whose name means “city-king”) is well attested in Greek and Greco-Phoenician sources.

<sup>76</sup> Presumably in the war against Kronos.

<sup>77</sup> See the theme of the sacrifice to Zeus Soter (“savior”) by Molorchos so that Herakles would return safely from his fight with the Nemean lion (Part 3, document 12.c).

shown to this day. (31) Greatest Astarte and Zeus, Demarous and Adodos<sup>78</sup> the king of the gods, were ruling the land with the consent of Kronos.” (. . .)

(The text of Philon continues through Eusebius’ P.E. 1.10.53, containing the account of rulers after Kronos, as well as a segment about child sacrifice, allegedly practiced by the Phoenician rulers in times of crisis, and a section on the wondrous nature of snakes.)

### 1.9.b. Phoenician Cosmogonies Mentioned by Damaskios

This document provides the only textual source for Phoenician cosmogonies outside Philon. These accounts were circulating in Greek in late antiquity (presumably translated from the original Phoenician). Our source this time is Damaskios, the late fifth- to early sixth-century CE Neoplatonic philosopher, who, in turn, paraphrases or quotes previous authors as sources for Phoenician mythology: he refers to Eudemos of Rhodes, the fourth-century BCE writer and pupil of Aristotle, and to Mochos, a legendary Phoenician wise figure of uncertain date. In this brief text, we can see again some of the Semitic names that appeared in Philon (Chousoron, Oulomos) and elements that surface in Orphic cosmogony, such as the cosmic egg. Desire (Pothos) also seems to have had a special place in Phoenician cosmogonies, judging by these two sources, which is comparable with the prominent place of Eros in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, standing among the four primordial elements.

SOURCE: C. López-Ruiz, *BNJ-FGrH* 784 F4, Damaskios, *De principiis* 125c.

The Sidonians, according to the same writer (i.e., Eudemos) set before everything Time, Desire, and Mist, and they say that from the union of Desire and Mist, as dual principles, emerged Air and Breeze, implying that Air is the unmixed part of the intelligible, whereas Breeze, moving out of it (i.e., of Air), is the vital pattern (prototype) of the intelligible. And they say that, in turn, from these two an egg was born, corresponding, I think, to the intelligible intellect.

Outside of Eudemos, I found the mythology of the Phoenicians, according to Mochos, to be as such: at the beginning there was Aither and Air, two principles themselves, from whom Oulomos was born, the intelligible god, himself, I think, the peak of the intelligible. From him, they say, mating with himself, was born first Chousoron, the opener, then an egg; the latter, I think, they call the intelligible intellect, and the opener Chousoron they call the intelligible force, as it was the first to differentiate undifferentiated nature. Unless after these two principles the highest is the one Wind, while the middle are the two winds Lips and Notos—for they make even these somehow precede Oulomos. As for Oulomos, he would be the intelligible intellect himself, and the opener Chousoros would be the first order after the intelligible, and the egg would be the sky; for they say that Ouranos (Sky) and Ge (Earth) were born from the egg as it broke in two, each one from one of the two halves.

<sup>78</sup> These seem to be epithets or alternative names for Zeus, which appear in North-West Semitic sources as variations (hypostases) of the storm god: *Dmrm* appears in Ugaritic texts in parallel with Baal Haddad, and Philon’s Adodos is Semitic Haddad or Adad, the storm god in the Levant.