



FROM MANHOOD TO GODHOOD

What we achieve inwardly will change outer reality.

- Plutarch

As it is the case with many other mythological figures, the origin of Trophonios is clad in mystery. There are almost no written references to his life as a mortal, and we must dig deep into the texts of classical Greek historians to be able to find anything at all. To our knowledge, there are only three brief accounts of Trophonios' life before his apotheosis: one found in Plutarch's *Consolatio ad Apollonium*, where Plutarch summarizes the great poet Pindar's take on Trophonios, one belonging to Charax of Pergamon, and a third one penned by Pausanias.

In Plutarch's brief account, we learn that Trophonios and his brother Agamedes, "(...) after building the temple at Delphi they asked Apollo for a reward, and he promised to make payment on the seventh day, bidding them in the meantime to eat, drink, and be merry. They did what was commanded, and on the evening of the seventh day lay down to sleep and their life came to an end." To modern sensibilities death may appear more a punishment than a reward, but according to Plutarch, this really wasn't so strange —the gods often rewarded the pious with a calm departure to the afterworld. He goes on to write that

“(…) if death indeed resembles a journey, even so it is not an evil. On the contrary, it may even be a good. For to pass one’s time unenslaved by the flesh and its emotions, by which the mind is distracted and tainted with human folly, would be a blessed piece of good fortune.”

From Charax of Pergamon we learn that Trophonios' mother, Epikaste, married Agamedes, ruler of Stymphalos in Arkadia, in second nuptials. Together, Agamedes and Trophonios surpassed any other living man in their craftsmanship, and they were especially known for building the temple of Apollon in Delphi. They also built a treasury for king Augeias of Elis, leaving a secret entrance by means of which they could enter at night and rob the king of his riches; all this helped by Kerkyon, a legitimate son of Epikaste and Agamedes. Augeias did not know what to make of his losses and asked Daidalos, who was staying with him at the time and was known for his craftsmanship and cleverness, to track down the thief. Thus, Daidalos placed a trap in the treasury, and Agamedes was caught by it and perished. To avoid Augeias from recognizing Agamedes, Trophonios cut his head off and then fled together with Kerkyon to Orchomenos. Inexplicably, his trickery does not work, and Augeias pursues them both, so that they separate and Kerkyon flees to Athens, while Trophonios flees to Lebadeia in Boiotia. There, he built himself a subterranean dwelling and lived in it for the rest of his days. After his death, the place manifested itself to the people as an oracle, and they sacrifice to him as a god.

A slightly different version is given by the Greek geographer and traveller Pausanias, who presents us Agamedes and Trophonios as brothers, rather than stepfather and step-son. On his account of the myth, Erginos had two sons, Agamedes and Trophonios, who became skilled building palaces and temples, and went on to build the temple of Apollon in Delphi and the treasury of Hyrieus. As in Charax' version, they made one of the stones from the treasury so they could remove it from the outside and regularly steal the riches inside. Hyrieus did not understand what was happening, seeing as the locks and doors were untampered with, while his treasure was disappearing at a steady pace. So he placed snares and traps over the vessels and gold containers, to trap and arrest the thief that was stealing from him. Then came Agamedes and Trophonios to steal again, but this time Agamedes was trapped and Trophonios decapitated

him to avoid him from being tortured and he himself from being informed on and accused as partner in crime. Fleeing, Trophonios was swallowed by the earth at the place in the grove in Lebadeia, where there are now found the Pit of Agamedes and the nearby stele.

Interestingly enough, Pausanias also points out the possibility of Trophonios not being Ergino's son, but actually being one of Apollon's many sons¹. This is worth noticing because Apollon was the patron of Delphi (therefore known as Πύθιος, *Puthios* -from Πυθῶ, *Pūthō*, the area around Delphi-) and the prophetic deity of the Delphic oracle. We are inclined to believe this to be the most probable case, taking into consideration Trophonios' oracular attributes. If this is true, the whole account of Trophonios' deification would make much more sense, as no common mortal would be rewarded with immortality and the gift of prophecy after stealing, decapitating a relative and fleeing justice. Furthermore; the Greek gods rarely did not keep a watching eye or directly interfered with the lives of their mortal offspring, and the only thing explaining how king Augeias (on Charax' version of the story) found out about the identity of the thieves is Apollon's divine intervention. If we accept Trophonios' divine ascendancy, it is not difficult to imagine that Apollon would have a plan for his offspring, in this case forcing him to flee to the exact point where his ascension to godhood would happen.

Adding to the mystery, we have Pausanias mentioning the fact that Trophonios was nursed by Demeter, under the name of Demeter Europa, and that sacrifices were made on her name in the oracle of Trophonios². The priests of the oracle claimed he was raised by Demeter along with her daughter Persephone on the site of his oracular shrine. This alone could confirm the notion of Trophonios being chosen by the gods since birth, to the point of having a goddess watch over him as a kid.

¹ Something that was apparently widely accepted as a fact among the classical sources; see for example Philostratus "Life of Apollonius of Tyana", 8. 19.

² (...) He who descends [into the oracle of Trophonios] sacrifices to Trophonios himself and to the children of Trophonios, to Apollon also and . . . to Demeter whom they surname Europa and say was the nurse of Trophonios." - Pausanias, Description of Greece 9. 39. 2-5 (trans. Jones, Greek travelogue, 2nd century AD).

So what we have is Trophonios being most probably Apollon's son and thus an excellent craftsman, building both the temple of Apollon on Delphi with his brother (or step-father) and the treasury of a king, sneaking in the treasury to steal the riches, and Agamedes' decapitation by the hand of Trophonios. Here is where the invisible hand of Apollon interferes and forces his son to flee to Lebadeia, all to be swallowed by the earth, or living inside a subterranean dwelling until his death, upon which the place becomes an oracle. This last part helps us understand and learn of Trophonios' chthonic nature, which is manifested (among other things) in the sacrificial offerings a petitioner had to perform in order to access his oracle, something specifically characteristic of the chthonian Greek entities. After his ordeal and communion with the earth (be it by his own hand building an underground dwelling, or by the hand of the gods, making the earth open and swallow him), Trophonios realizes his ascendancy and transcends his mortality, inheriting the gift of prophecy and reaching out to the minds of those who come to consult him.

THE OPHIDIC MEDITATION

What follows is an introductory step into the essence of what working with Trophonios is; it is a way to get accustomed to the feeling of powerlessness that is common under the overwhelming presence of a demigod. For this initial rite there is no need for the ritual tools that will be introduced and used throughout this book, you must simply find a place of silence and solitude, ideally a room with no windows so that we can simulate the darkness of the underground. This place will not necessarily become your definitive ritual area; we will discuss that in a different chapter. On the floor of this temporary ritual area we will set a large linen (a bed-sheet, for example) so we can lie comfortably on our back (but not too comfortably though; some people advise against meditating on a supine position due to the risk of falling asleep). The second item we will be needing is a black blindfold, to ensure even more that we will not be able to see during the ritual.

Once we are in our meditation area and we are sure that we will not be interrupted or disturbed, we can begin. Firstly, we will sit on the linen and tie the blindfold in a way that is firm but comfortable. As soon as we are ready, we will lie on our back with our arms extended along our body, with our eyes closed. We then proceed to let our mind soften into a light relaxation. We inhale through our nose into our abdomen, trying to let the chest remain as still as possible. We do not need to count but we should inhale until we cannot take in more air comfortably. During this inhaling, we must imagine all of our tension, apprehension and anxiety flooding into our chest, gathering in our abdomen.

We then release the breath slowly, tightening our stomach muscles. The air should be pushed out through the stomach as we exhale. We breathe through pursed lips as we let the breath out. Once again, counting is unnecessary; we simply exhale until we cannot comfortably continue to breathe out. During the exhaling, we must visualize the emotional energy buzzing above us and quickly dissipating. We continue this cycle of inhaling, gathering negative emotions, and releasing them together with our breath for a total of six times, but then for the seventh time we take instead a full breath, to the top of our lungs. After this, we will feel that our mind has quieted and that all our mundane problems and troubles seem to not be any longer the focus of our existence. In this state of spiritual quietude, we will then open our awareness to our immediate environment, trying to see the surroundings in our minds and recreating them in a mental picture. It is important though not to be detached from this mental image; we must be fully conscious of the fact that we are in that place in that precise moment. Analyze every detail from any possible angle and cement it in its place, be aware that you are there. After we have a clear mental picture of our surroundings, we can then acknowledge the presence of the absolute darkness that surrounds us. Make this darkness belong to your mental picture of the place, let it thicken and pulse around you, almost like a fog. We now visualize the slithering shape of a huge snake, slowly emerging from this fog of darkness. We see it coming from beyond the limits of our visualization and into the center of it, closer and closer to us. As it approaches us, we start again breathing with our abdomen, with our attention focused on the shape that slowly starts wrapping itself around our ankles, our legs, our waist, all the way up to our shoulders. We feel the strong muscles that barely allow us to take another breath coil all around our body, until we are face to face with the serpent's eyes. But instead of suffocating us, we feel that each breath we take and let out is accommodated by the serpent's embrace, almost becoming a second skin. We must fight the desire to move or shake, we must simply relax and accept that we are not in control now. Once this realization permeates our consciousness, we open our eyes and stare deep into the serpent's eyes. What you see there will vary; inhuman coldness, mockery, understanding, or simply our own reflection. We should try to hold like this as long as we can, but once we are ready we can visualize the serpent uncoiling away from our body with each breath we take, which will slowly allow us to move again; first our shoulders, then our arms,

and finally our legs. Once we visualize the serpent withdrawing beyond our mental image of our surroundings, the meditation comes to an end.

As we mentioned before, the purpose of this exercise is to get us used to the idea of surrendering ourselves to a power greater than ourselves, but it also a way of starting to tear the Veil and let the other side be aware of our conscious existence, of our efforts towards a superior and more elevated version of ourselves. The Ophidic meditation should be performed on a daily basis from now on.