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The west in the mentality of the Greeks of the 8th century BC

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to reveal the specifics of spatial perception among the Greeks of the 8th century BC in terms of the mental reconstruction of imaginary mythical space by way of an example of their representation of the spatial direction of the west. The first part of our research is devoted to a consideration of the problem of the perception of the extreme west as a source of danger to the world order and the analysis of mental spatial images performing the function of psychological defense. In the second part of the paper, the opposite qualitative characteristics of the west as mythical space in its interconnection with mythical time are considered. We have thus attempted to demonstrate ambivalence in the perception of the west inherent in people with mythological thinking.

Keywords

mythological thinking; mythical space; west direction; psychological defense; mythical time

Introduction

As one of the fundamental categories of any culture, a sense of space is inherently present in people's picture of the world despite the time when they lived or their social affiliation.¹ All basic mental processes, such as cognition, representation, thinking, and emotions, are always enclosed in a definite spatial and temporal figuration.² Space with its certain natural and climatic characteristics has predetermined the forms of organization in people's lives and thus influenced the specifics of their mentalities. In the world comprehension of contemporary people, space is thought to be a category with such features as homogeneity, infinite divisibility, and equality to itself in every part.³ It was perceived in a completely different way by the representatives of ancient societies who employed mythological thinking. E. Cassirer therefore noted the qualitative heterogeneity of mythical space, as seen in the fact that each direction in it has a certain emotional significance and special semantic emphasis originating from the mythical sacral beginning and belonging to every object that fills it.⁴

One of the initial coordinates for space comprehension is the human body.⁵ The cardinal points for orientation in space are laid according to its structure. E. Husserl presupposed space perception as a kinesthetic system based on the moving of the parts of a human body together with sensual perception via sight and touch as a starting point for orientation in space.⁶ According to M. Heidegger, the initial point for spatial perception is the space "Zuhandenen" filled with the things that are located in the immediate vicinity of the percipient. This initial orientation by virtue of these things lays a primitive system of coordinates, such as above – below, in front of – behind, here – there, by means of which the surrounding space is perceived.⁷ Among the fundamental coordinates of space comprehension based on space orientation according to the human body structure is the perception of the directions right and left. The right hand, as generally prevailing in the human body, laid the basis for the qualitative division of things as weak and strong, main and subordinate, positive and negative,⁸ and the polarization of phenomena in the surrounding world that presupposed the creation of binary oppositions as one of the most significant features of world perception for people with mythological thinking.⁹ This pre-

1 Carlson & Kenny (2005: pp. 35–65); Cassirer (1925: pp. 103–106); Glass & Holyoak (1986: pp. 136–140).

2 Hübner (1985: pp. 96–97).

3 Cassirer (1925: pp. 107–108); Schlick (2005: pp. 77–80); Toporov (1983: p. 229).

4 Cassirer (1925: pp. 109–110).

5 Lincoln (1986: pp. 1–41); Giannakis (2019: p. 239); Yanchevskaya & Witzel (2017: pp. 27–29).

6 Husserl (1997: pp. 264–267).

7 Heidegger (1967: pp. 101–103).

8 Caillois (2015: pp. 30–38); Giannakis (2019: pp. 256–257); Hertz (2004: pp. 97–98).

9 Clay (2003: p. 15); Cassirer (1925: pp. 110–113); Hertz (2004: p. 96); Konrádová (2008: p. 25); Meletinsky (1998: p. 186).

disposition of the minds of ancient and primitive peoples to polarization and contrasting is reflected in their ritual practices and everyday customs.¹⁰

Taking into account the assumption about the human body as the initial coordinate for constructing the primary system of indicators for spatial orientation, we would like to note another binary opposition predetermining the specificity of spatial perception among people with mythological thinking. This binary opposition is “here” and “there.” According to it, the space in immediate vicinity of a person with the objects filling it is comprehensible and safe, whereas the space lying far away, out of direct perception, is incomprehensible and thus unsafe.¹¹ This predisposition of mythological thinking to polarization with different phenomena is also shown in the dichotomy of “own” and “alien,” which among the Greeks of the 8th century BC is revealed in the opposition of two types of space: profane space, cultivated and arranged by people, and mythical space. The first was the space filled materially and felt sensually as the area of human life, where various religious practices were undertaken to maintain its harmony.¹² The other space was imagined, mythical space, which was considered as the habitat of fantastic creatures and the location of the underworld.¹³ This imaginary space as the field of the main interest for our research will be considered in this paper in connection with the two main cardinal points – east and west – lying at its extremities. The incomprehensibility of borders and the unpredictability of this kind of space for archaic consciousness caused a feeling of defenselessness in the face of the spontaneous forces of nature that filled it. That led to an aspiration to explain this space, to organize it, to enclose it within the limits accessible to the mind, which was implemented by creating some images performing a protective function and helping with the suppression of fear.¹⁴ One of the aims of our paper is to consider the role of these spatial images in the mentality of Greeks in the 8th century BC as a specific mechanism of psychological defense from the creatures inhabiting the mythical space.

Just as the human body laid the basis for the fundamental coordinates in spatial orientation and spatial perception, another starting point for orientation in space defining

10 Durkheim (1995: pp. 34–38).

11 Caillois (2015: pp. 49–50); Giannakis (2019: p. 240); Hertz (2004: p. 102).

12 J. F. De Jong (2012: pp. 21–35), by analyzing of the problem of space in Ancient Greek narrative, came to the conclusion that it existed as the background for the action, i.e. the spatial frame filled with various objects where the scene took place. Regarding the role of natural landscapes in the depiction of action, see Bowra (1952: pp. 133–136). Regarding the role of various things in constructing the background for action in Homer’s narrative, see Minchin (2001: pp. 100–102). The earliest term in Greek literature for defining space is the word χώρα. It could have been the earliest lexical definition for space in Ancient Greek thought as well; see Algra (1995: p. 33). In Homer, this word is used for denoting the space surrounding the hero at the moment of the action. It could have the meaning of a spot in space (Il., 6. 516, 17. 394; Od., 16. 352), a position in space (Il., 23. 350), or a distance (Il., 23. 520–521). J. Carruesco (2016: pp. 72–74) in his analysis of Greek choral performance noted that the term χορός as a singing and dancing activity was also used for defining the ground where such a performance took place, and it thus had the double meaning of the action and the spot in space at the same time.

13 Antypas (2017: p. 10); Cole (2004: p. 7); Gernet (1933: pp. 299–300); Vidal-Naquet (1970: pp. 1278–1297).

14 Bettelheim (2010: pp. 13–15); Cramer (1991: pp. 41, 50–54); Jung (1980: pp. 110–112); Romm (1992: p. 10).

the specificity of spatial comprehension among people with mythological thinking was the solar cycle.¹⁵ M. Heidegger regarded the sun and the phenomena of the world that are connected to it, such as light, day, and warmth, and the changes that are created by its absence, such as night, darkness, and cold, as present inherently in human life. These phenomena are connected with some spots in space as the cardinal points and are thus identified with them. In M. Heidegger's words, "die Plätze dieses in wechselnder Weise und doch gleichmäßig ständig Zuhandenen werden zu betonten 'Anzeigen' der in ihnen liegenden Gegenden."¹⁶ E. Durkheim highlighted the aspiration of people with a primitive form of thinking to the polarization of various objects in the surrounding world into two opposite groups of phenomena.¹⁷ At the same time, he emphasized the opposite feature inherent in their minds, namely their inclination to arrange all constituents of the world into groups by sign of resemblance.¹⁸ We can see a similar dualism among Greeks of the 8th century BC in the division of all objects and phenomena into two opposite groups and the combination of various things and states into groups by their inherence in similar semantic connotations they share. We will trace this peculiarity of their space perception below.

Spatial Directions and the Solar Cycle

We have considered above that two objects in a surrounding space played the role of the initial coordinates for orientation within it. One of these starting points for a person is their own body, in correspondence with which spatial coordinates such as right–left, above–below, and here–there are laid. The other is the sun and the alteration of its position in the sky towards an observer designates in their mind the initial representations of the cardinal points, the main two of which are connected to its shifting to the right or left, i.e. to the east or west. In connection to the corresponding changes in space, these two cardinal points and the spatial directions acquired semantic connotations arising in people's minds through impressions of these changes. E. Cassirer therefore noted that the spatial directions for people with mythological thinking enclosed their own specific meaning.¹⁹ We, in our turn, would like to note that such a qualitative heterogeneity in

15 One of the most frequent motifs on Greek ceramics from the sub-Mycenaean period through the Dark Ages and surviving in the 8th century BC is concentric circles and semicircles. They are usually positioned in the upper part of vessels in the case of semicircles and in their centre in the case of circles. The idea of circular movement is a fundamental one in the art of ancient peoples, including the Greeks. See Carruesco (2016: pp. 78–79); Goodison (1989: p. 31); van de Velde (2003: pp. 155–157). It could be connected with the sensual perception of time as an alternation of natural processes in their dependence on the solar cycle. We could suppose that concentric semicircles positioned in the upper part of a vessel might depict the sun rising out of or setting into Oceanus. If so, the multiplicity of circles in this motif could be connected to the solar cycle.

16 Heidegger (1967: p. 103).

17 Durkheim (1995: pp. 34–38).

18 Durkheim (2009: pp. 25–26; 34–37).

19 Cassirer (1925: pp. 111–113).

viewing various world phenomena was present in the perception of spatial directions among the archaic Greeks as well, which manifested itself in the opposition of east and west that is clearly revealed in the Homeric epics. One peculiarity in the perception of spatial directions among people with mythological thinking is in the feature according to which the right–left direction is connected with the above–below direction based on the solar cycle, i.e. the rising and setting of the sun at a definite point on the horizon. This overlap of spatial coordinates is reflected in the lexis of archaic Greeks. Thus, the west is the point where the sun plunges into the river Oceanus and then underground, while the east is the place where the sun rises into the sky out of Oceanus, as follows from the Homeric hymn to Hermes where we can find that:

ἥελιος μὲν ἔδυνε κατὰ χθονὸς Ὀκεανόνδε
 αὐτοῖσιν θ' ἵπποισι καὶ ἄρμασιν:²⁰
 “... Helios, with chariot and horses,
 was setting beneath the earth toward Ocean.”²¹

Ἦώς δ' ἠριγένεια φῶος θνητοῖσι φέρουσα
 ὄρνυτ' ἀπ' Ὀκεανοῖο βαθυρροῦ²²
 “Early-born Dawn, bringing light to mortals,
 rose from deep-flowing Ocean.”

Thus, the east, associated with the position of the sun aboveground, was connected with such phenomena as light, day, and life, while the west, associated with the position of the sun underground, was semantically linked to gloom and night. Moreover, Tartarus and Hades were located underground, and so the west was believed to be the place from which death came and Hesiod once told us that Death was among the family of Night.²³ In the Homeric hymn to Hermes, we can also find the correlation of underground space to the realm of the dead:

ρίψω γάρ σε λαβῶν ἐς Τάρταρον ἠερόεντα,
 ἐς ζόφον αἰνόμορον καὶ ἀμήχανον: οὐδέ σε μήτηρ
 ἐς φάος οὐδέ πατήρ ἀναλύσεται, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ γαίῃ
 ἐρρήσεις ὀλίγοισι μετ' ἀνδράσιν ἠγεμονεύων²⁴
 “I will hurl you, throw you down into misty Tartaros,
 to the darkness of terrible, unescapable doom.
 Your mother or father will not free you to the light;
 you will wander underground, leader among little men.”

20 Herm., 68.

21 Transl. by D. J. Rayor (2014).

22 Herm., 184–185; Od., 23. 244.

23 Theog., 211–212.

24 Herm., 256–259.

Such a correlation of semantical categories can also be traced in Homer's and Hesiod's poetry, where we can find the association of the place where the sun plunges into Oceanus with the place where Tartarus and Hades are located as well as an association with the term Erebus, which in Homer is meant as the gloom of the netherworld.²⁵

This association of the west with gloom and the netherworld can be traced in Penelope's words:

ἢ ἔπειτα μ' ἀναπάξασα θύελλα
οἴχοιτο προφέρουσα κατ' ἠερόεντα κέλευθα,
ἐν προχοῆς δὲ βάλοι ἀψορρόου Ὠκεανοῖο²⁶
“Or let some whirlwind pluck me up
And sweep me away along those murky paths and
Fling me down where the Ocean River running
Round the world rolls back upon itself!”²⁷

Here, we can see the mention of the “roads of gloom” – ἠερόεντα κέλευθα – with a link to Oceanus, which, as noted above, was a place connected to the solar cycle.²⁸ The semantical closeness of the west with the netherworld can be found in the overlapping of the west, as a spatial direction or the place where the sun sets, with the noun ζόφος, which has the meaning gloom, darkness²⁹ and the adjective ἠερόεις meaning shadowy, dark.³⁰ Thus Homer, for example, depicted the sunset with the words φάος οἴχεθ' ὑπὸ ζόφον.³¹ In Hesiod's *Theogonia*, the “sources and endings” laying down in the Tartarus εἰσιν ἀργαλέ' εὐρώεντα³² and Tartarus itself is ἠερόεντος³³ as well.

Through a further analysis of Homer's poetry, we come to the conclusion that these terms were also used to define the west and the east. Thus, failing in his attempt to get oriented in the space of the mythical island, Odysseus claimed:

ὦ φίλοι, οὐ γάρ τ' ἴδμεν, ὅπη ζόφος οὐδ' ὅπη ἠώς,
οὐδ' ὅπη ἠέλιος φασίμβροτος εἶσ' ὑπὸ γαῖαν,
οὐδ' ὅπη ἀννεῖται³⁴

25 Il., 8. 367–369, 9. 572; Od., 10. 528, 11. 37; Theog., 515, 669.

26 Od., 20. 63–65.

27 Transl. by R. Fagles (1996).

28 K. Connors (2016: p. 168) compared Penelope's road to the road of the sun.

29 This term is used in Homer to define the darkness of Tartarus. See Wacziarg (2001: p. 134).

30 Titans imprisoned in Tartarus live πέρην Χάεος ζοφεροῖο: Theog., 814; Hades in Il., 1. 4 is ἠρώων; Tartarus in Il., 8. 13 is ἠερόεντα and Τάρταρά τ' ἠερόεντα in Theog., 119; the collocation ζόφον ἠερόεντα is used as a synonym for Hades in Il., 15. 191, 21. 56; Od., 11. 155; the subterranean darkness in Od., 20. 356 is marked by the words: Ἐρεβόσδε ὑπὸ ζόφον.

31 Od., 3. 335.

32 Theog., 739.

33 Theog., 736.

34 Od., 10. 190.

“...we can’t tell east from west, the dawn from the dusk,
nor where the sun that lights our lives goes under earth
nor where it rises.”

We can find an analogous method of spatial orientation in the mention of Ithaca, which is located in the west at the edge of the Greek world:

ἡμὲν ὅσοι ναίουσι πρὸς ἠῶ τ’ ἠέλιόν τε,
ἡδ’ ὅσοι μετόπισθε ποτὶ ζόφον ἠερόεντα.³⁵
“It’s known the world around,
to all who live to the east and rising sun
and to all who face the western mists and darkness.”

αὐτὴ δὲ χθαμαλὴ πανυπερτάτη εἰν ἀλί κείται
πρὸς ζόφον, αἰ δὲ τ’ ἀνευθε πρὸς ἠῶ τ’ ἠέλιόν τε³⁶
“lies low and away, the farthest out to sea,
rearing into the western dusk
while the others [islands] face the east and breaking day.”

From these examples, we can see that there are not any special words for denoting these cardinal points. Instead, such terms as the sun or the dawn for the east and gloom or darkness for the west, as semantic connotations associated with these cardinal points in their correlation with the solar cycle, are used. A similar situation can be seen in the semantics of black, which was the color of the night coming from the west and was associated with death.³⁷ We can follow this coincidence of connotations in the description of the rite of sacrifice, where a white sheep is sacrificed to the Sun, while a black one is sacrificed to the Earth:

οἴσετε ἄρν’, ἕτερον λευκόν, ἑτέρην δὲ μέλαιναν,
Γῆ τε καὶ Ἥελίῳ.³⁸
“Bring ye two lambs, a white ram and a black ewe,
for Earth and Sun.”³⁹

Another example of the semantic overlap of such connotations as right–left, east–west, and good–bad is seen in the practice of augury surviving in Greece in the 8th century BC according to which a bird’s moving to the right⁴⁰ was a good omen, while its moving

35 Od., 13. 240–241.

36 Od., 9. 25–26.

37 For example, in the Iliad: 3. 360, 4. 461, 503, 5. 22, 47, 503, 6. 57.

38 Il., 3. 103–104.

39 Transl. by A. T. Murray (1928).

40 Od., 2. 154, 15. 160–164, 525–526, 24. 311; Il., 24. 315–321.

to the left foreshadowed misfortune.⁴¹ In lines 12. 239–240 of the *Iliad*, the practice of such interpretation is explained by the words:

εἴτ' ἐπὶ δεξι' ἴωσι πρὸς ἠῶ τ' ἠέλιόν τε,
 εἴτ' ἐπ' ἀριστερὰ τοί γε ποτὶ ζόφον ἠερόεντα.
 “whether they fare to the right, toward the dawn and the sun,
 or to the left toward the murky darkness.”

In these lines, we can thus trace the connection of the spatial direction from which the birds have come with the rising or setting of the sun. Accordingly, in everyday practice there was a custom to start moving from the right side.⁴² In a description of a sacrifice to the dead, on the contrary, participants in the rite and their actions were oriented to the west.⁴³ Taking into account these instances, we could come to the conclusion that the west had negative connotations in the world perception of the Greeks of the 8th century BC and was associated with gloom, misfortune, and death.

By analyzing Greek cosmogonic mythology as represented in Hesiod's *Theogony*, we come to conclusion that the world was seen as the coexistence of two sources, one of which supported the world order, while the other was a dissociative and destructive force. The first source was personified in the figure of Zeus as the guarantor of the existent universe, while the second was represented in the figure of creatures associated with primordial time, when the cosmos had not obtained its final designation. All of these forces, having been defeated by Zeus, nevertheless continued to exist localized in the extreme west and, through their unpredictable chthonic nature, could pose a danger to the world order. Here, we come to the key problem in our research, which lies in revealing the role of spatial directions in the formation of the world picture of Greeks of the 8th century BC. This problem is connected to the tendency among people with mythological thinking to oppose east and west. In the scholarly literature, there is a tradition in accordance with which the west, as a place connected to sunset in different cultures, is considered in its association with the semantics of death and a concentration of chthonic creatures in its extremities, and so, for this reason, could pose a danger to the human world.⁴⁴ We do not intend to argue with this tradition, especially taking into account the fact that the extreme west was believed among the Greeks to be the place where Hades, as the last refuge for souls, was located, lying deep underground in gloomy and terrifying Tartarus, which, in its turn, apart from being a dwelling for creatures who could destabilize the cosmic order, was also the final point in the solar cycle, that is, the place where night came from.⁴⁵ In this paper, we will nevertheless attempt to determine if the

41 Od., 20. 242–246; Il., 12. 200–209.

42 Il., 9. 175–176; Od., 17. 365.

43 Od., 10. 524–529.

44 Anderson (1958: pp. 2–11); Ballabriga (1986: pp. 61–62; 107–110); Bilić (2013: pp. 247–272); Caillois (2015: pp. 30–38); Cassirer (1925: pp. 123–129); Connors (2016: pp. 166–168); Nakassis (2004: pp. 215–233); Romm (1992: pp. 11–12).

45 Bilić (2013: p. 269); Nakassis (2004: pp. 217–218); Johnson (1999: p. 13).

west was associated with only night and death or if there were some other connotations to this spatial direction.

The West and the “Edge of the Earth”

The idea of the “edge of the earth,”⁴⁶ located in the extreme west, was connected with the image of Tartarus.⁴⁷ This mythical locus is important for us first of all because of its close vicinity to Tartarus. Denoting the transition to this lower spatial level, πείρατα γαίης were not only connected with Tartarus semantically, but, in some cases, were identified with it. In the *Theogony*, Hesiod thus mentioned that the Titans:

... ὑπὸ ζόφῳ ἠερόεντι
κεκρύφαται βουλῆσι Διὸς νεφεληγερέταο
χώρῳ ἐν εὐρώεντι, πελώρης ἔσχατα γαίης⁴⁸
“... are hidden under murky gloom
by the plans of the cloud-gathered Zeus,
in a dark place, at the farthest part of huge earth.”⁴⁹

Hesiod also mentioned that Hekatonheires, overthrown into Tartarus by Kronos:

ἔνθ’ οἳ γ’ ἄλγε’ ἔχοντες ὑπὸ χθονὶ καιετάνοντες
εἶατ’ ἐπ’ ἔσχατιῇ, μεγάλης ἐν πείρασι γαίης⁵⁰
“dwelling there, under the earth, in pain,
they sat at the edge, at the limits the great earth.”

Zeus, addressing Hera, said the following words:

εἴ κε τὰ νεΐατα πείραθ’ ἴκηαι
γαίης καὶ πόντοιο, ἴν’ Ἰάπετός τε Κρόνος τε
ἤμενοι οὔτ’ ἀύγῃς Ὑπερίονος Ἥελίοιο

46 πείρατα γαίης or sometimes ἔσχατα γαίης.

47 Referring to the idea of πείρατα, περάτη, and περάς in the meaning of outer limits, horizon, and ending, respectively, A. Purves (2006: pp. 4–8) came to the conclusion that in Homer’s narration πείρατα meant an end and a border in both the spatial and temporal senses. This word was used to denote both the edge of the earth and the horizon as the place where the sun sets as well as for the ending of Odysseus’ wandering. Moreover, πείρατα related to the sense of a spatial border denoting a transition to a qualitatively different spatial level (Purves 2006: pp. 2–4). J. Romm (1992: pp. 11–12) pointed out the limiting role of this representation. T. Bilić (2013: pp. 269–270) noted both the spatial and the temporal significance of πείρατα, emphasizing the fact that this representation was based on the solar cycle, which, in its turn, was reflected in the specificity of Tartarus as not only a spatial level, but also as the place where various temporal phenomena, such as night and day, life and death, were connected.

48 Theog., 730–731.

49 Transl. by G. W. Most (2006).

50 Theog., 621–622.

τέρποντ' οὐτ' ἀνέμοισι, βαθὺς δέ τε Τάρταρος ἀμφίς:⁵¹

“But of thee I reckon not in thine anger,

no, not though thou shouldst go to the nethermost bounds of earth and sea,

where abide Iapetus and Cronos, and have

joy neither in the rays of Helios Hyperion nor in any breeze,

but deep Tartarus is round about them.”

Due to feeling defenseless in the face of the chthonic forces inhabiting the mythical space at the “edge of the earth,” which was associated with Tartarus, the Greeks typically constructed in their minds some specific limits with the purpose of restraining those forces from intervening in human lives and attempting to destabilize the cosmic order. This tendency to construct mental boundaries expressed itself in the creation of various spatial images with a defensive function, which are considered in the following part of this paper.

Mechanisms of Psychological Defense in Perceptions of the West

The first aid in such spatial modeling was an assimilation of the mythical space into that space arranged and cultivated by people, which was achieved by structuralizing it and adding into it some spatial images with a regulative and protective character. There is no more arranged and protected kind of space for people than their own houses. One of the Greek proverbs from the Archaic age states that “it is better to stay at home, while it is harmful to be outside.”⁵² It is therefore most likely that the elements performing a defensive function within the space of human dwellings were also present in Tartarus where the rebellious Titans were imprisoned. From Hesiod, we learn that their jail was surrounded by a bronze wall holding them inside.⁵³ Its exit was blocked by a bronze door made by Poseidon.⁵⁴ In addition, there in Tartarus:

ἔνθα δὲ μαρμάρεαι τε πύλαι καὶ χάλκεος οὐδὸς ἀστεμφής

ρίζησι διηκεέσσιν ἀρηρώς, αὐτοφυής:⁵⁵

“... the marble gates are and the bronze threshold

fitted together immovably upon conditious roots, self-generated.”

In Homer, Zeus in anger threatens to bring the rebellious Olympian gods down to Tartarus, that is:

51 Π., 8. 478–481.

52 οἶκοι βέλτερον εἶναι, ἐπεὶ βλαβερὸν τὸ θύρηφιν: Erga., 365; Herm., 36.

53 τὸν πέρι χάλκεον ἔρκος ἐλήλαται: Theog., 726. τεῖχος δὲ περοίχεται ἀμφοτέρωθεν: Theog., 733.

54 θύρας δ' ἐπέθηκε Ποσειδέων χαλκείας: Theog., 732.

55 Theog., 811–814.

ἤχι βάθιστον ὑπὸ χθονός ἐστι βέρεθρον,
 ἔνθα σιδήρειαί τε πύλαι καὶ χάλκεος οὐδός⁵⁶
 “... the deepest gulf beneath the earth,
 the gates whereof are of iron and the threshold of bronze.”⁵⁷

Thus, this description of Tartarus contains such spatial images correlated with human culture as a wall, a threshold, and gates. All of these artifacts had special significance in the arrangement of the home space, as well. For instance, when mentioning Odysseus' house, Homer paid special attention to the protective elements in its structure:

... ἐπήσκηται δέ οἱ αὐλή
 τοίχῳ καὶ θριγκοῖσι, θύραι δ' εὐερκέες εἰσὶ
 δικλίδες· οὐκ ἄν τις μιν ἀνήρ ὑπεροπλίσσαιτο⁵⁸
 “... the courtyard wall is finished off with a fine coping,
 the double doors are battle-proof –
 no man could break them down.”

Other spatial images, such as a threshold, also had a special meaning in organizing the home space. E. Cassirer has noted that the representation of spatial borders in the mind of people with mythological thinking ascended to the primeval feeling of a threshold that possessed sacredness.⁵⁹ M. Eliade regarded thresholds and doors, related to thresholds, as symbols of transition dividing the inner space of a human dwelling or a temple from the outer space.⁶⁰ The endowment of these artifacts with sacredness made it possible to minimize harmful influences from the outside. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the description of the city space of Uruk included such architectonic elements as the thresholds, “lying from ancient times,” and the city walls, “founded by the seven sages.”⁶¹ We would like to note that in this passage attention is focused on the ancience of these elements of city architecture and their involvement in the mythical time that gave them sacral meaning. Referring to the allusion to a threshold in the space of a house in Greek culture, we can trace that stepping over a threshold meant making a transition into a qualitatively

56 Il., 8. 14–15.

57 It is most likely that these fragments told about two levels in the arrangement of the space of Tartarus. The first level could be associated with the Titans' jail, located at the bottom of this giant gulf, encircled with a copper wall and gates made by Poseidon. The second level could be represented by the gates of marble in the *Theogony* and iron in the *Iliad* and the bronze threshold, which were apparently situated in the upper part of Tartarus, at its entrance. In this paper, we will not consider in detail the arrangement of space in Tartarus. Our purpose is to point out the presence of elements of human culture there as an attempt to bring some order to this space to prevent the intervention of chthonic forces in the world order established by Zeus. For a more detailed analysis of the space of Tartarus, see Johnson (1999: pp. 8–28); Northrup (1979: pp. 22–36).

58 Od., 17. 266–268.

59 Cassirer (1925: pp. 126–127).

60 Eliade (1987: p. 25).

61 Tab. 1. 1. 13, 19.

different kind of space.⁶² Turning back to the description of the threshold at the entrance to Tartarus, we find it important to note its cosmic significance. Hesiod mentioned that this threshold is ἀστεμφής, ρίζησι διηνεκέεσσιν ἀρηρώς and αὐτοφνής.⁶³ In this way, its incorruptibility and perpetuity is emphasized as well as its sacred meaning as a border between two worlds. The bronze threshold thus drew a boundary line between the earth and the underworld, while the gates were designed to hold inside the chthonic forces imprisoned in Tartarus.⁶⁴ In addition to its delimiting and designating significance, the cosmic sense of this threshold is also revealed in the fact that it was, most likely, mentioned by Hesiod as the spot where Day and Night met,⁶⁵ and thus had not only spatial, but also temporal importance as a place connected with the solar cycle as the source of life processes maintaining cosmic harmony.⁶⁶ By adding these spatial images of human culture to the space of Tartarus, elements of order were introduced and thus the possibility of interference by the Titans imprisoned there in the organization of the world order established by Zeus was prevented.

In addition to adding the protective elements correlated with human culture directly to the space of Tartarus, beyond it we also find a range of geographical objects playing the role of a sacred boundary and minimizing danger to the world order. One such spatial image is the river Styx flowing right out of Tartarus. In the scholarly literature, Styx is regarded as a symbol of the new world order, established by Zeus and maintained by the oath of the water of this river, binding all spheres of the universe and thus maintaining the cosmic balance.⁶⁷ In Homer, we find an example of such an oath:

ἴστω νῦν τόδε γαῖα καὶ οὐρανὸς εὐρὺς ὕπερθε
καὶ τὸ κατειβόμενον Στυγὸς ὕδωρ, ὅς τε μέγιστος
ὄρκος δεινότατός τε πέλει μακάρεσσι θεοῖσι,⁶⁸
“Earth be my witness now, the vaulting sky above
And the dark cascading waters of the Styx – I swear
By the greatest, grimmest oath that binds the happy gods.”

62 The space of the temple: Od., 7. 82–89; the space of Alcinoüs’ palace: Od., 8. 79–81; the space of the Winds’ dwelling: Il., 23. 199–202; the space of the cave where baby Hermes and his mother nymph Maia live: Herm., 6, 23, 26, 66, 233, 234.

63 Immobile, fixed with roots in the ground, self-born.

64 In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, we find a similar object of mythical geography in the image of the gate of the mountain, which is located at the edge of the earth and opens only at sunrise and sunset to let the sun in: Tab. 9. 2. 1–15. M. Eliade (1987: p. 25) noted that in various cultures a threshold is guarded by special guardians. Among the Greeks, the role of guardians is played by the Hekatonheires watching the gates at the entrance to Tartarus: Theog., 731–739. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the gate of the mountain was guarded by scorpion people: Tab. 9. 2. 6.

65 Theog., 748–749.

66 About the solar threshold and the role of Tartarus in the solar cycle, see Nakassis (2004: pp. 217–218); Johnson (1999: pp. 25–26). D. Johnson (1999: p. 25) remarked that the epithet μαρμάρεαί, which is used in relation to the gates at the entrance to Tartarus, means that they are not made of marble, but “shining.” Thus, this epithet points out their connection to the solar cycle.

67 Blickman (1987: p. 350); Bollack (1958: p. 17); Clay (2003: p. 22); Lye (2009: pp. 3–7, 27).

68 Od., 5. 184–187.

We would also like to note that Styx was a spatial image and a personification of the world order relating to not only mythical space, but also mythical time. It was Styx who took an oath to Zeus as the first among the gods, and her oath was one of the key moments in establishing Zeus' superiority and a designation of the cosmos.⁶⁹ Her children Victory, Power, and Might became the attributes of Zeus' power as well as signs of the new world order he set up.⁷⁰

The next object of mythical geography, relating to the representation of the "edge of the earth," was the river Oceanus. In Homer, Hera says to Zeus that she intends to go to the "edge of the earth"⁷¹ to see the god Oceanus and his wife Tethys, who gave her shelter during the Titanomachy. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, we can also trace the connection of Oceanus with the west and the edge of the earth in the lines mentioning that the Gorgons live:

πέρην κλυτοῦ Ὠκεανοῖο
 ἔσχατιῇ πρὸς Νυκτός, ἴν' Ἑσπερίδες⁷² λιγύφωνοι⁷³
 "...beyond the Glorious Ocean
 at the edge towards the night, where the clear-voiced
 Hesperides are."

In Homer, the sea-god Protheus, when foretelling Menelaus' destiny to him, mentions that he will not die, but will be sent by the gods to the Elysian Fields⁷⁴ at the extreme boundaries of the earth⁷⁵ where Oceanus flows.⁷⁶ Hesiod in his *Works and Days* also noted that the heroes who survived the Trojan War had been taken by Zeus to the limits of the earth,⁷⁷ where they inhabit the Isles of the Blessed near Oceanus' depths.⁷⁸

Oceanus, which had a significant place in the spatial model of the ancient Greeks, was thought to be a giant river surrounding the earth⁷⁹ and possessing sacredness. In Homer, it is the source of the universe, the river from which "all the things were born."⁸⁰ This source of life was also personified as a powerful god whose daughter was the river Styx.⁸¹

69 Theog., 390–403.

70 Νίκη, Κράτος, Βίη: Theog., 384–388.

71 πείρατα γαίης: Il., 14. 195–199.

72 From the Greek word ἔσπερα, which means the west.

73 Theog., 274–276, 519.

74 Ἠλύσιον πεδῖον.

75 πείρατα γαίης.

76 Od., 4. 562–566.

77 ἐς πείρατα γαίης: Erga., 168.

78 μακάρων νήσοισι παρ' Ὠκεανὸν βαθυδίνην, ὄλβιοι ἦρωες, τοῖσιν μελιθδέα καρπὸν: Erga., 172.

79 ἀπορροῦ Ὠκεανοῖο: Il., 18. 606–607; Od., 20. 65; Theog., 776.

80 ὅς περ γένεσις πάντεσσι τέτυκται: Il., 14. 246.

81 Il., 14. 200–204.

Crossing Oceanus in the west, Odysseus and his companions reached Hades.⁸² Despite the fact that Oceanus, as the river encircling the earth, also relates to the east as the place where the sun rises,⁸³ in the scholarly literature its “dark side”, that is, its association with Tartarus, gloom, and death, is emphasized. Thus, scholars’ attention is focused on the west part of this object of mythical geography, which we can also trace through the example of the verses from the literature of the 8th century BC cited above.⁸⁴ The concentration of attention on the connection of this water source to the west could give evidence that Oceanus had a special meaning apparently in its connection with this spatial direction. A number of scholars have pointed out its limiting function in relation to Tartarus and the end of the earth.⁸⁵ Considering the role of spatial boundaries in the aspiration of archaic Greeks to bring order to alien space, J. Romm identified Oceanus with the idea of *πείρατα γαίης*.⁸⁶ He pointed out the double nature of this river. On the one hand, it acts as a defensive spatial border, dividing the space of Gaia from the underworld. On the other hand, emphasis is placed on the character of Oceanus as an immense, borderless, chaotic, and terrifying river perceived as a source of danger. We are inclined, however, to consider the nature of this giant river in other aspects. We would like to mention Oceanus’ friendly attitude toward the Olympic gods, which is underlined by the episode of giving shelter to Hera during the Titanomachy. The immensity of this river, in its turn, stresses its reliability as a spatial backstop against the chthonic creatures dwelling in Tartarus, as illustrated by the words of Odysseus’ dead mother:

μέσσω γὰρ μεγάλοι ποταμοὶ καὶ δεινὰ ῥέεθρα,
Ὠκεανὸς μὲν πρῶτα⁸⁷
“great rivers flow between us, terrible waters,
the Ocean first of all ...”

Thus, we can conclude that the Greeks created in their consciousness a special water source playing the role of a sacred boundary and protecting the human world from the intervention of chthonic forces inhabiting the “edge of the earth.”

82 Od., 10. 508–509, 12. 1–2.

83 Od., 3. 1–3, 19. 434.

84 It is noted in the literature that the significance of Oceanus rises in relation to the extreme west. See Connors (2016: pp. 167–168); Nagy (1973: p. 150); Romm (1992: pp. 12–15).

85 G. Nagy (1973: p. 150) has noted that Oceanus manifests itself as a “symbolic boundary delimiting light and darkness, life and death, wakedness and sleep, consciousness and unconsciousness.” R. Onians (2000: pp. 313–316) also emphasized the interconnection of Oceanus and the concept of *πείρατα*, which in archaic Greek minds also had the meaning “to bind” or “to fix.” Oceanus has a similar meaning in the literature of antiquity. R. Onians devoted attention to verse 790 of the *Theogony*, where it is mentioned that Oceanus is reeled around the earth nine times, like a rope. The word *πείρατα* has a similar meaning in the works of other authors of antiquity. Based on semantic proximity of the meaning “to bind” with the image of Oceanus encircling the earth like a rope, R. Onians brought us to understanding the spatial boundaries that are expressed by these spatial images.

86 Romm (1992: pp. 10–12).

87 Od., 11. 157–158.

In addition to the objects of mythical geography, a number of territories inhabited by people were also thought to be mental spatial barriers. As the edge of the ecumene, Homer mentioned territory inhabited by the Ethiopians, with whom the Greeks were, apparently, familiar only in speculative terms. It is only noted that the territory of their living in the mind of Greeks in the 8th century BC took up extensive space stretching from east to west, and it was speculated to be the edge of the human world.⁸⁸ The boundary character of this land is also emphasized by the fact that it was located in the immediate vicinity of the mythical river Oceanus.⁸⁹ The Ethiopians' blessedness and the frequent presence of the Olympic gods with them⁹⁰ gave this borderland a sacred character. The next border territory in the west was the mythical island of Scheria, inhabited by the Phaeacians. Nausicaa, when describing this place, noted that the Phaeacians:

οἰκέομεν δ' ἀπάνευθε πολυκλύστῳ ἐνὶ πόντῳ,
 ἔσχατοι οὐδέ τις ἄμμι βροτῶν ἐπιμίσγεται ἄλλος⁹¹
 "live too far apart, out in the surging sea,
 off at the world's end – no other mortals come to mingle with us."⁹²

As the blessed people living under Poseidon's protection, the Phaeacians were gifted from this god with the ability to cross over any water distance beyond the control of mere mortals.⁹³ The Phaeacians' blessedness thus endowed their land with sacredness.

Besides the lands of the Ethiopians and the Phaeacians, though inhabited by human beings but referring rather to mythical geography, the island of Ithaca, being the extreme limit of the Greek world in the west, also played the role of a protective spatial boundary. Homer noted that it lay facing the gloom,⁹⁴ while other neighboring islands, such as Dulichion, Same, and Zacynthus, faced the dawn and the sunrise.⁹⁵ As the westernmost Greek island, Ithaca in minds of the Greeks of the 8th century BC could contact Hades. In Book 24 of the *Odyssey*, the dead suitors travel to Hades via the island of Lefkada, which is situated in the west, between Ithaca and Kerkyra, by the gates of Helios, which is the place where the sun sets, and the people of dreams, who are mentioned by Hesiod among the creatures born by Night.⁹⁶ It is also important for us to note that it was the homeland of Odysseus as the main cultural hero of 8th century Greece, who was under Athena's protection as were the members of his family. The protection of this goddess

88 Αἰθίοπας τοὶ διχθὰ δεδαΐαται, ἔσχατοι ἀνδρῶν, οἳ μὲν δυσσομένου Ὑπερίονος οἱ δ' ἀνιόντος: Od., 1. 23–24.

89 Il., 23. 205–206.

90 Il., 1. 423–424, 23. 205–206; Od., 1. 23–24.

91 Od., 6. 204–205.

92 C. Segal (1962: pp. 22–26) therefore emphasized the boundary character of Scheria as a transitional point between the human and the mythical spaces manifesting Odysseus' "return to humanity" and "assertion of his human identity." A similar opinion was held by N. Marinatos (2001: pp. 407–408).

93 Od., 7. 34–35.

94 αὐτὴ δὲ χθαμαλὴ πανυπερτάτῃ εἰν ἀλί κείται πρὸς ζόφον.

95 αἱ δὲ τ' ἄνευθε πρὸς ἠῶ τ' ἠέλιόν τε: Od., 9. 24–26.

96 Od., 24. 11–12; Theog., 212.

thus spread around the entire territory of Ithaca. It was Odysseus who was able to reach the gloomy edge of the earth and return back. This extreme point of the ecumene was supposed to maintain harmony between Hades and the human world.⁹⁷

In sum, we may come to the conclusion that the aspiration of Greeks of the 8th century BC to separate their “own” space from the “alien”, mythical one manifested itself in the following features of their spatial organization:

- Addition of defensive artifacts, such as a wall, a threshold, and gates to the space of Tartarus.
- Invention of the spatial image of the river and goddess Styx, which was connected with the moment in mythical time when the cosmic order was stated, so she herself was an ordering element.
- Creation of the image of Oceanus as a river encircling the earth and performing a limitative and defensive function.
- Endowment of the borders of the ecumene with sacredness, which manifested itself in a god’s grace to the people living there.

Ambivalence of the East and West

But was the west indeed so dangerous for the human world as it seemed to be at first sight? The second part of our paper is devoted to consideration of this problem. Further research leads us to the assumption that despite the perception of the west as a threat to the existence of the world order because of the chthonic forces concentrated within its limits, at the same time this spatial direction was not associated only with night and death. Our subsequent analysis of the Homeric epos and Hesiod’s poems enables us to determine a pronounced ambivalence about the west in the world picture of the Greeks of the 8th century BC, in connection with which this spatial direction cannot be considered only in terms of its negative connotations.

From the *Odyssey*, we can learn that the east, just as the west, could be thought of as a source of danger. Thus, the Lotophages, whose area of living could be correlated with the region of North Africa, because of the lotus eating that was also mentioned by Herodotus in his description of Egypt,⁹⁸ turned out to be dangerous for the travelers not for their tremendous appearance, but because of that lotus, which deprived memory and consciousness of their own cultural affiliation, which was unacceptable for the Greeks. Another instance of hostility in the east is the Isle of Aea. Its location to the extreme east could be confirmed by the mention of this island as being the place where the sun

97 N. Marinatos (2001: pp. 403–405) noted the similarity of Odysseus’ route to the solar cycle. We can assume that Ithaca as his native land could also have had a cosmic meaning. Moreover, Athena’s grace to Odysseus and the members of his family brought them closer to the Ethiopians and Phaeacians. Regarding the evidence of the existence of Odysseus’ cult on Ithaca and its expansion since the Archaic age, see Malkin (1998: pp. 62–67).

98 Hdt., 2. 92. The Lotophages are also mentioned by Herodotus among the peoples of Northern Africa: Hdt., 4. 181.

risers.⁹⁹ It thus must be the spot concentrating the best connotations in a counterweight to the west. The travelers faced danger there again, however, and this time it came in the figure of the goddess Circe. As in the case of the Lotophages, Circe did not have any teratomorphic features in her appearance, but the magic drink she made deprived Odysseus' companions of their human appearance. In both cases, the danger thus came not from the inhabitants of this eastern part of mythical space, but from some plants growing in this region and unknown to the Greeks. In one of his allusions to Egypt, Homer notes that in this land that was half mythical for the Greeks of the 8th century BC:

... τῆ πλείστα φέρει ζείδωρος ἄρουρα
 φάρμακα, πολλὰ μὲν ἐσθλὰ μεμιγμένα πολλὰ δὲ λυγρὰ¹⁰⁰
 "... the teeming soil bears the richest yield of herbs ...
 many health itself ... and many deadly poison."

In both cases, there would thus not be talk about the opposing east and west directions as good and bad, but rather about the opposing "own" and "alien" spaces in terms of the danger of an unknown inherent in the perception of both east and west.

Another field for comparing the east and west for us is the life conditions in these regions. In the description of Egypt in Homer, for example, emphasis is placed on a happy life in this country full of treasures, with the possibility to be healed from any disease owing to the abundance of healing herbs, which also could be an indicator of the fertility of the land, the special grace of the gods to the local people, all of whom were from the race of Paeon.¹⁰¹ At the same time, the Phaeacians living in the west seem to be no less blessed. Among all the goods, the abundance of riches in the house of Alcinous, the fertility of the land, and the ideal climatic conditions that allow harvesting all year round are mentioned as is the grace of the gods that gifted the Phaeacians with the ability to easily overcome the sea space. Therefore, when comparing the east and the west, we come to the conclusion that the east, just as the west, could be a source of danger, and, at the same time, the west, just as the east, acted in Greek mythology as a source of abundance, which leads us to suppose that the west in the Greek mind was not only a space concentrating negative connotations.

Death, Immortality, and the West

One more aspect of ambivalence about the west that is significant for our research can be found in the fact that while it is, on the one hand, a territory associated with death, this spatial direction turned out, on the other hand, to be connected with the idea of eternal life. The crucial tendency inherent in mythological thinking that we can trace

⁹⁹ Od., 12. 1-4.

¹⁰⁰ Od., 4. 229-230.

¹⁰¹ Od., 4. 231-232.

in the perception of space by the Greeks of the 8th century BC lies in the fact that the qualitative heterogeneity of space was combined with the qualitative heterogeneity of the time flowing within it. P. Vidal-Naquet therefore assumed that the inhabitants of the mythical space whom Odysseus meets when wandering in the sea existed in a completely different time. Through the qualitative characteristics of their space and their lifestyle, P. Vidal-Naquet concluded that these territories could be correlated with the Golden Age as described by Hesiod.¹⁰² The spatial characteristics of the ideal island of Scheria, as well as the lifestyle of its inhabitants, are indeed close to the world of the gods on Olympus.¹⁰³ This island seems to be in a different time, not touched by the realities of the Iron Age, and all the troubles that Pandora released onto the world have bypassed it.

We can trace this interconnection of spatial and temporal parameters in the world perception among the Greeks of the 8th century BC by illustrating the symbolism of gold. This metal, present in the definition of the qualitative characteristics of mythical time, also comes into play in the description of mythical space. When analyzing the meaning of metals in the mentality of the Ancient Greeks, J. P. Vernant regarded gold as a symbol of royal power.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, A. S. Brown, revising Vernant's symbolics of metals, correlated gold with the life of the gods, referring to the fact that gold could be related to the gods through the logic of its incorruptibility, which can be found both in Homer's and Hesiod's poems and in lyric poetry.¹⁰⁵ We intend to maintain this position, and for this purpose we refer to the further consideration of cases where gold is present in connection to the Golden Age and mythical space.

Gold in Homer is mentioned many times in relation to the Olympic gods. Various attributes of Zeus and other gods emphasizing their power are made of gold.¹⁰⁶ These attributes include the golden scales used by Zeus to define the destiny of the Trojans and Achaeans¹⁰⁷ as well as the golden chain that he intended to spread from the sky to the earth to prove his superiority over the other gods.¹⁰⁸ The Golden Generation, created by the Olympic gods, has parallels in the golden maids of Hephaestus.¹⁰⁹ A. S. Brown also emphasized that the abundance of things made of gold in Alcinous' palace and the grace of the Olympic gods toward the Phaeacians brought them closer to the Golden Generation, which is as distant from the Iron Generation in time as the Isles of the Blessed are distant from them in space.¹¹⁰ The same abundance of gold can be found in Herodotus'

102 Among the features of the Golden Age, P. Vidal-Naquet mentioned the incredible fertility of the land; cannibalism, which we can find both in the case of Kronos devouring his children and in the *Odyssey* among the Cyclopes and Laestrygonians; and the lack of a need for sacrifices to the Olympic gods among inhabitants of the mythical space. See Vidal-Naquet (1970: pp. 1278–1297).

103 *Od.*, 6. 42–45.

104 Vernant (2006: p. 33).

105 Brown (1998: pp. 393–394).

106 For example, *Il.*, 1. 195, 4. 1–4, 8. 41–44, 416, 442.

107 *Il.*, 8. 68.

108 *Il.*, 8. 19.

109 *Il.*, 18. 417–419.

110 Brown (1998: pp. 397–398).

description of the lives of the Ethiopians, who in the Greek mind were under the grace of the Olympic gods.¹¹¹ It is also important for us to highlight one more moment in the semantics of gold, namely, that the connection of this metal with the world of the gods reveals one of its connotations as the metal symbolizing immortality.¹¹² Thus, the Golden Generation after death turns into good demons, that is, they continue their existence in another form of life; the beatified heroes live on the Isles of the Blessed, where the golden apples symbolizing immortality grow. In another episode, Hesiod also mentioned the golden apples that are guarded by a giant serpent by the “edge of the earth,” that is, in the extreme west, where the Isles of the Blessed are supposed to be located.¹¹³ Moreover, the serpent guarding the golden apples is a chthonic symbol, which accentuates the inaccessibility of immortality for ordinary people.¹¹⁴ In addition to mentioning the abundance of gold in Alcinous’ palace, we would also note the concentration of treasures, including goldware, in Menelaus’ house.¹¹⁵ On the one hand, the abundance of gold in the dwelling of this hero of the Trojan War acts as testimony to his valor, but on the other hand, Menelaus, as well as Alcinous, is associated with the west. Moreover, Menelaus was also associated with immortality, which was given to him by the gods.¹¹⁶

111 Hdt., 3. 23.

112 Brown (1998: p. 393).

113 Theog., 334–335. In a paper devoted to the perception of the west in the Middle Ages and the early modern period, L. Baritz (1961: pp. 621–637) devoted attention to the existence in various cultures of the representation of some islands, lying far in the west, that were associated with a happy life. In L. Baritz’s word, “For those peoples who had a concept of a second life, the west, as death, necessarily signified the life which comes from death” (1961: p. 621). As observed by the author, in European culture there was a representation of the “fountain of youth” first mentioned in the 12th century. Initially, it was located somewhere in the extreme east, but from the 15th century this source turned out to be located in the west (1961: p. 630). Taking into account this fact, we can assume that a similar shift in the representation of eternal life and youth could also be possible in archaic Greek culture. As a consequence of this shift, the initial representation of the west as the source of night and death was combined with the its representation as the source of eternal life that could come after death.

114 An analogy with the golden apples as a symbol of endless life can be traced in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, where we can find mention of a flower restoring youth (Tab. 11. 267–270a; 287–288). This flower grows on the bottom of the ocean and is stolen from Gilgamesh by a snake. The ocean bottom in this myth plays the role of the lower spatial level by analogy with Tartarus. It also features the chthonic image of the snake stealing the flower giving everlasting youth. As in the case of the giant serpent guarding the golden apples at the “edge of the earth,” which is a place associated with a transition to a lower spatial level, the flower stolen by the snake symbolizes the inaccessibility of eternal youth and life for mortal people.

115 Od., 4. 72–75.

116 Also significant for our research is the paper by W. S. Anderson where the author draws a parallel between Menelaus and Odysseus, emphasizes the relationship of these heroes to the west. Both are found on islands in the west, but these islands have opposite connotations. The island of Calypso is connected with death, which can be confirmed by the floral and arboreal symbolism that is also present in the description of Hades, while the Isles of the Blessed with the golden apples growing there act as a symbol of immortality. See Anderson (1958: pp. 2–11).

Conclusion

Thus, in combining the symbols of death and immortality in connection with the west, we can trace the semantic ambivalence in the perception of this spatial direction. On the one hand, the west, associated with the “edge of the earth,” was thought to be the space where the sun sets, where the night comes from, and where souls go after death. On the other hand, the west was also supposed to be a spatial direction that possessed sacredness and sustained connection with the mythical Golden Age, and so by moving westward, travelers shifted not only in space, but also in time. In conclusion, we shall also draw our attention to the aspect that the binary opposition of “own” and “alien” spaces as safe and dangerous shows in the perception of both the east and the west. The east, as a place with a concentration of wealth and divine grace, being the source of life in connection to the sunrise, is also an alien space and staying there could be dangerous for travelers. At the same time, the west, despite being the place associated with the semantics of death and inhabited by chthonic monsters, could be friendly to people, as follows from the instance of Alcinous’ hospitality to Odysseus.

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