

ŚUNAḤŚEPHA THE ‘DOG’S MEMBER’ AND HERMES
‘THE DOG STRANGLER’,
OR DOG AS *PHARMAKOS* IN THE IAMBIC CODE*

By

KAROL ZIELIŃSKI

The metaphors of a dog is extremely frequent and plays a crucial role in reprimand poetry. The starting points for the understanding of its nature would be two unclear sections in Sanskrit and Greek literatures. The comparison of these two sections is justified by the presence of the elements of the same pattern. I posit that they should be associated with a scapegoating rite complex, known in the ancient Greek culture as *φαρμακός*. The similarities found both in the myth pattern, as well as in the elements of the used language code allow us to find a common (for both cases) socio-cultural basis of this phenomenon. It is inextricably linked with the role of the blame poetry and status of a poet of reprimand in archaic Greece and ancient India. Hence it may be assumed that there is a common Indo-European provenance for the metaphoric use of ‘a dog’ in the rituals of community purification through the elimination of an individual. Our knowledge on this subject is continuously advancing thanks to the researchers, but still many questions remain without clear answers. I do hope that the discussion below will, to some extent, facilitate the understanding of this complex matter.

*

In the *Bhagavata Purāṇa* (IX 7, 21; IX 16, 30–37; VII 5, 46) and in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (VII 13–18) we find a complicated, though brief, story of Śunaḥśepha whose name means ‘dog’s member’. At the beginning it is connected with the story of a childless king Hariścandra, who wished to have a descendant

* I would like to express my gratitude to the Lanckoroński Foundation, whose scholarship enabled me to prepare this publication. I would also like to thank Dr. Hanna URBAŃSKA and Dr. Przemysław SZCZUREK for their help in my work on Sanskrit texts.