

“Vera, licita, et naturalis magia”: Renaissance Conceptions of *Orphica* in Andreas Christian Eschenbach’s *Orphei Argonautica, Hymni, et de Lapidibus* (1689)

This paper investigates the Renaissance reception of *Orphica* through Andreas Christian Eschenbach’s 1689 edition of *Orphei Argonautica, Hymni, et de Lapidibus*, using this primary source to examine *Orphica*’s evolution as both a mystical and educational text. Eschenbach’s edition is the first bilingual Greek-Latin presentation of Orphic hymns, complete with comprehensive commentary from prominent figures like Henri Éstienne, Joseph Scaliger, and Eschenbach himself, and *possibly* geared toward student readers. Through its accessible layout and annotated paratext, the edition opens a door for readers at the intersection of philology and mysticism, marking a critical shift in how Renaissance intellectuals assembled and engaged with Orphic corpora. Relying on sources such as Vossius and Borch, Eschenbach’s preface exemplifies the Renaissance’s emerging skepticism around traditional authorship and chronology, presaging debates in the 18th century that culminated in the Homeric Question (Eschenbach: 1639).

This study highlights how Eschenbach’s edition embodies the Renaissance fascination with Orpheus not only as a mythic poet but as a Neo-Platonic *vates* whose “true, licit, and natural magic” made him a harbinger of Christian truths (Walker: 1953). For philosophers like Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Orpheus stood as both a pagan sage and a bridge to Christian mysticism, his hymns imbued with insights that prefigured Christian theology. Eschenbach’s preface—describing the experience of reading *Orphica*“ as if descending into an abyss of venerable antiquity”—reflects this reverence, blending scholarly inquiry with a deep sense of esoteric mystery and straddling the line between a scholarly artifact prefiguring nineteenth and early twentieth century scholarly editions like Hermann Gottfried’s and Otto

Kern's and an active, mystical text as it was seen by Mirandola and Ficino.

This paper argues that Eschenbach's edition represents a landmark in the early modern reception of classical texts, bridging scholarly and spiritual perspectives. As both a potential teaching tool and a source of mystical exploration, *Orphica* in this volume finds new life, offering Renaissance readers an intimate experience of the divine mysteries of nature. By embedding the Orphic hymns within a Renaissance print context that appealed to both students of philology and mystics, Eschenbach's edition exemplifies a broader shift in how classical texts were engaged, becoming sources of knowledge, inspiration, and wonder. This analysis ultimately addresses a gap in scholarship on Renaissance esotericism, classical reception, and early print culture, illustrating how *Orphica* helped redefine intellectual and spiritual inquiry in the early modern period.

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