



Η ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ

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Winding the Festival Cycle

by Todd Jackson

Today, we are less a Hellenic Pagan community than a small but definite number of individuals, who though scattered across the world have become aware of each other. Each of us is to varying degrees nourished and antagonized by the communal chatter that, though it goes nowhere and accomplishes nothing, binds us nevertheless. Once the screen goes dark, the real life begins - the life in this world, that world having revealed itself thick with Gods.

Ritual is the most heightened expression of living as a human being in that world. When that ritual is a reconstruction of an ancient Hellenic festival, something still more is accomplished. Here one stands not just beside the Gods, but with the ancients who last worshiped them centuries ago. The mere effort to submit one's ritual to an ancient form is itself a sacrificial act to the Gods. Rather than reaching into one's own self for the proper forms of worship, the Hellenist submits the self to a larger tradition in an attitude of pious humility. It is a patient learning of the God's nature through actions one rarely understands at the outset of this practice. The fragmentary knowledge we have of the festivals simultaneously makes their reconstruction that much more of a sacrifice and guarantees individual expression.

Several of us, quite independent of each other, have taken to reconstructing and leading not just festivals but festival cycles:

John Wells in Los Angeles, Dave Romano in Philadelphia, Pyrokanthos in San Francisco, and, well behind them but still determined, myself in Las Vegas. No one organization, much less one communal dictate, embraces us all, even though we may individually function within some larger group such as Hellenion or Neokoroi. The tendency toward festival cycles is emerging spontaneously, as though an expression not of a council, but of a culture. With the festival cycle, the entire calendar year is braced by days held aside for the Gods; in this, human time is dignified. Leading these festival cycles is a way to mark the very passage of our lives with our worship.

For to lead any reconstructed festival is to be haunted by having done so once the calendar rolls round to the following year. I have led the festival of Thargelia twice now. The first one was just myself and a handheld mirror, and to even call it a Thargelia is to commit some small crime against the ancients. It might be better labeled "a feint toward Thargelia," and it probably got more spirits mad at me than Apollon Apotropaios cleansed from me; no doubt I at least kept him busy!

However, having performed that "feint," two certainties entered my life. Come the next May, I would now have to do this again, in part simply to do a better job.

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Η ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ

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The Neokoroi are a group of Hellenic hard polytheists working to foster communities, festivals, and temples, to provide guidance and information on religious matters, and to ensure the strength and longevity of the worship of the Greek gods.

Η Επιστολή (a “message” or “letter”) is published four times a year. We offer articles, hymns, prayers, poetry, reviews, information, community notices, fiction, recipes, and anything else of interest to the Hellenic pagan community. We welcome feedback and submissions from guest writers.

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Winding the Festival Cycle (continued from page one)

The second certainty was that I would one day have to lead another festival, in order to honor more facets of Apollon than Apotropaios the Purifier.

The following May was then my second Thargelia. This time I wasn't alone but with two other Hellenists, Jen Guimaraes and Jeremiah Lewis; this time I dispensed with the handheld mirror, and we made ourselves a small pharmakos to cast our impurities upon. We dispatched it without mercy, and were made clean. Now another May approaches. I look upon the festival I will lead with great anticipation.. It has become an annual occasion I must rise to meet. Doing so, I will have learned something still more about the purifying power of Apollon, distinct in being a purification that points me back into worldly action rather than away from it, into the next world. I am learning to know Thargelia as an active man's point of sloughing off the sludge, leaving me unhindered in the open light:

Blast loose the angry fingers of the dead
That would clutch our feet.

I've led one Pyanepsia, just this past November, and though the God's presence permeated that day I also realized that my comprehension of Phoebos Apollon, who sends the light of the Sun, is still crude. Next autumn, though, I'll have grown in my learning. Though autumn after, I'll have learned yet more, and all this will have taken place under the pressure of the festival. I will come to see more clearly the relationship between Apollon and Helios, the Sun, and the relationship between the light of day and the light of the human mind – which, I already sense, is not merely metaphor.

And now I turn my attention to Karneia, the Spartan festival of the chase, a festival I thought to lead last August and did not lead, and will not fail to lead again. For now I would learn of Apollon, founder of cities, who gives mortals civilization as compensation for death itself:

I will witness. That we are strong together
We who each of us is to die.

I seek out a fit festival to Lykeios Apollon, wolf and wolf-slayer, sensing that within this ritual will lie insight into the very moment of human distinction from the animal, and therefore insight into human nature itself. It won't be long before I've got myself a true annual festival cycle. Cultus will have become culture, if yet a culture of a mere few, and year by year my relationship to Apollon will deepen with the certainty of a spiral bit boring down into the wood.

This is significant beyond the matter of my own spiritual edification. It means that the festivals of Apollon will be available once again, as, on both coasts, the festivals of Dionysos are again available, and, elsewhere, those of the other Deathless Ones. The fires of the Gods are yet few and far between, but they have been rekindled. While, as years pass, others among our fellows wander in for the warmth, each year the weight of each festival will dig one inch deeper into the souls of those of us who find ourselves becoming priests. Those who attend Thargelia this year, be they two or twenty, may be assured that the priest has long pondered the decision of self against one's own self that produces the pharmakos as that self's unclean other.

We do not have elder priests, rooted in unbroken tradition, to teach us the rituals. We do not have the advantage of having taken part in them annually since childhood. But because, today, we are forced to lead very few people or even just ourselves through the festivals, we necessarily abstract them to their essence, and see them radically. What is the difference between two forms of purification: the pouring of water upon one's head, and the production, then destruction, of the pharmakos, out of one's own defilement? What, exactly, does the Karneia chase tell us about the relative health of the city and its best – fleetest – individual citizen?

I look forward – we all look forward – to the point in time when performing the festivals will be a deeply ingrained repetition of word and action, the variations growing increasingly subtle as the years pass, till one day only the priest will be able to note those variations at all. The Gods seem to be leading the revival of their worship patiently, a little at a time. If in twenty years great numbers of Las Vegans come together each May, perhaps to toss the rottenest man in town off the Stratosphere Tower, the priest will be seasoned in Hellenic ritual, initiate into the Mysteries of the god, and the festival no mere feint but, truly, a grand and holy Thargelia.

To Aphrodite, from a fragment of Sappho

by Aled Morgan

Evening star, you bring back all the bright dawn scattered,
Bringing the sheep and the goat and bringing the child to its mother,
Only I am left to greet night's beauties alone.

Gather her up, Evening Star, with all of day's wanderers,
Send her here to me, where I lie wakeful,
The soft breeze alone touches my cheek on her empty pillow.

(First two lines Sappho, trans. Robert Chandler, from the Everyman edition of Sappho.)

For Hermes

by Sannion

You lifted him from the ruin of his mother,
this infant God in swaddling flames,
held him close as he trembled,
watched as he took in the world for the first time.
You wrapped your traveler's cloak around his tiny frame,
smiled at Zeus' baby boy,
knowing what joy he would bring to care-worn mortals,
knowing the pranks you'd both play,
knowing that you'd dance with him one day,
surrounded by the buxom nymphs and shades of the lonely dead.
You raised your hand over his head,
looked once more into those innocent purple eyes,
and gave Bacchus a goat's form,
tiny horn nubs and a perky tail,
to hide him from the vengeful gaze of cow-eyed Hera.
Ye Hermes! Good friend of my God, I praise you!

Nymph Worship

by Oenochoe

Worship of the nymphs – the divinities of the natural features of the landscape – was very important in ancient Greek religion, especially in the rural areas. A shepherd or farmer might even pay more regular cult to the nymphs than he would to the Olympians, because the nymphs impacted his daily life. They lived all around him in the woods, in his pastures, they guarded the spring water his goats drank, they lived in the same caves that gave him occasional shelter. Greek pastoral poetry speaks of shepherds meeting and sometimes falling in love with nymphs, during the long hours they spent with their flocks on mountainsides. And yet, one rarely hears the nymphs mentioned in modern Hellenic circles, which is why I am writing about them here.

There are many different names for the nymphs, depending on what type they are. The word nymph itself means “bride”, although nymphs are rarely married; however they are always female – their male counterparts are the satyrs, silens, and centaurs. Dryads are nymphs of the trees, especially oaks, who are so bound together that they are born and die with their trees. (In general, nymphs are said to live extremely long lives, but are not actually immortal.) Oreades are nymphs of the mountains. Naiads belong to springs and other bodies of water, whereas nereids are nymphs of the ocean, and limnades live in lakes, marshes and swamps. Epimeliades protect sheep flocks, and leimoniades reside in flowery meadows. There are many more.

Some individual nymphs figure prominently in mythology. For example, Thetis (a nereid), the mother of Achilles; Echo who fled from Pan; Daphne who was chased by Apollon and became his beloved laurel tree; and Maia, the mother of Hermes. In myths, the nymphs are most often in the company of (or being chased by) Pan, Hermes, Apollon and Dionysos –

the rural gods. Whereas mythology tends to portray these relationships as rather unwelcome or hostile, in cult it seems these gods were worshipped side by side with the nymphs, with no animosity suggested.

An example of such were the nymphs of the Korykian Cave on Mt. Parnassos, above sacred Delphi. This cave was particularly holy, not just to the nymphs but to Pan, Hermes and perhaps Dionysos as well. The nymphs there are mentioned in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, when Apollon tells Hermes to find them, for they will teach him the skills of divination. They are portrayed as bees, and in fact the nymphs were often associated with bees elsewhere, and honey is known as an especially appropriate gift for them.

Almost everywhere the nymphs were known for their healing abilities (also often present in the waters they protect) and for their prophetic powers. Religious rites for them often included some form of simple divination, like the use of astragaloi (knucklebones). Thousands of knucklebones were found in the archaeological excavation of the Korykian Cave, and of many other nymph caves in Greece. The nymphs could also bestow this gift of prophecy on certain mortals; such a person might then become a nympholept.

The word nympholepsy has a number of connotations. One refers to an overall heightened awareness and increased verbal skills, thought to also be a gift from the nymphs, which made a man into a poet. A more negative version of nympholepsy views possession by the nymphs as an unwanted illness. Sometimes the word describes a physical rapture, an actual abduction of a person by the nymphs. Finally, a nympholept can mean a person who is exceptionally devoted in a religious sense to the nymphs, one who keeps a sanctuary for them and is inspired to prophesize.

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Nymph Worship (continued from page three)

Historically, these nympholepts occupied a marginalized role in society like many other visionary types, and yet they often created and maintained important cult sites for the nymphs that were visited by pilgrims. The nympholept sometimes had a special relationship with one particular nymph, a relationship that may have been romantic/sexual in nature. Hence, since all Greek nymphs are female, nympholepts were men.

The love of the nymphs was so strong in the Greek people that it survived the conversion to Christianity, and is the one major feature of ancient religion still practiced up to recent times. In modern rural Greece, all nymphs are now called nereids, but the myths and practices have stayed relatively unchanged over the centuries. Tales are still told of boys or men being captured by a nymph, and offerings are still made at wells and rivers and such.

However, modern Hellenic paganism has, it seems, largely overlooked this important aspect of ancient practice, to our detriment. We have focused on the gods and the cult of the city too much, and have left behind the vital spirits of nature. These spirits, or demi-gods, or whatever you want to label them – the nymphs – are present everywhere, even in cities. In Athens there were still places to worship the nymphs, usually around wells. And so there are fountains, and trees, and parks in our modern cities, plenty of places to feel the presence of the nymphs and pay them cult.

I think it is time for a revival of the cult of the nymphs in modern Hellenismos. It is so easy to begin, just leave offerings in your area at a prominent river or stream, a beautiful tree, cave, or any other natural feature. Appropriate offerings include libations (though it was said that the nymphs do not appreciate wine libations, as it casts aspersion on their own fresh water), astragaloi, honey, jewelry, shells, and votive female figurines. Next perhaps we could start to build shrines in the wilds, to honor them. And I think that some people, having endeavored to meet the nymphs more directly in their area, might even develop a more personal and intimate relationship with a specific nymph, along the lines of the ancient nympholepts.

Overall, I believe rediscovering the nymphs will greatly enrich our religion, as well as encourage us to pay the proper respect these beautiful divinities deserve.

For more information about the nymphs, the author especially recommends the book *Greek Nymphs: Myth, Cult and Lore* by Jennifer Larson.

Here are also some websites to visit:

<http://www.paleothea.com/Nymphs.html>
<http://homepage.mac.com/cparada/GML/NYMPHS.html>
<http://www.winterscapes.com/nympholept/>



Dionysos as God of Sacrifice

by Jennifer

The worship of Dionysos came late to Greece, perhaps sometime after the Dorian invasion in 1100 BCE from Thrace and Phrygia. Dionysos Dithyrambus, (the Twice Born) actually had a number of different birth stories. The most common of them was that he was the son of Zeus and Semele, the daughter of Cadmus (king of Thebes). When Semele asked Zeus to appear to her in all his glory, she burned in his radiance. In despair, Zeus took up the fetus from her womb and sewed him into his own thigh until his second birth.

In Orphic theology, Dionysos is the son of Persephone, Queen of the underworld, rather than Semele. Zeus remains his father and he is said to have impregnated his daughter Persephone, in the form of a serpent. According to the myth, as a young child, Dionysos (or Zagreus) was kidnapped by the Titans, who lured him with marvelous toys. While Dionysos was gazing at his own image in a mirror, the Titans sliced his throat with a sacrificial knife. The child-Dionysos was then cut up into pieces and first boiled, then roasted. Zeus, in despair and attracted by the smell of cooking flesh, realizes what is being

cooked and kills the Titans with a thunderbolt and resurrects Dionysos.

The Orphics identified the soul as separate from the body, but believed the soul resided within the shell as punishment for past grievances. Some say that the ancient grief of Persephone is sorrow for the death of her son Dionysos at the hands of the Titans. Humans pay the price because the Titans consumed the God, and were then burned by Zeus. Out of their ashes, man was made, thus we contain both. By living an Orphic life and avoiding the bloodshedding mortals may be purified and achieve liberation.

Dionysos symbolized primal Greek religion. For the main function of Dionysos' attention was to reveal to every individual the stranger within. The earliest forms of Dionysos worship were shamanic. They used rhythm, trance and dancing, drama and the early concept of gender bending, sexual abandon and inebriation to transcend normal consciousness. This practice was believed to bring Dionysos

and his followers into divine communion through spiritual release before death.

Dionysos' most vivid connection is with the vine and the alcoholic beverage produced from it; wine. As Dionysos represented the sap, juice, or lifeblood element of nature. With no doubt as to why, with this quote from Horace; "Wine brings to light the hidden secrets of the soul, gives being to our hopes, bids the coward fight, drives dull care away, and teaches new means for the accomplishment of our wishes." Dionysos is even said to be the mystic vine itself. A simplified version of a sacrificial rite was practiced in the vineyards throughout Greek antiquity. The ritual sacrifice of a goat to the vines was enforced by the law, for when goats were permitted to enter the vineyard, they sinned against the vines. "So it came about," says Marcus Terentius Varro, "that the he-goats were sacrificed to Dionysos, discoverer of the vine, as though to make atonement, a head for a head."

It is said that during the festival of the Haloa, named on the account of the fruits of Dionysos, (the aloai are the vineyards) Demeter and Dionysos once shared the offerings of the first new harvest of both wine and grain. During the feast all kind of fruits are consumed except those not appropriate during the Eleusinian mysteries (pomegranates, apples, eggs, fowls, and certain types of fish). This festival was probably intended to lighten the depressed hearts of those people who were in need of some revelry during the gloomiest part of the year.

During the festival of the Anthesteria, probably the most famous of all Dionysian festivals, a "bloody sacrifice" takes the form of sacramental drinking of the newly opened wine, and restitution takes the form of a sacred marriage, in which the victim, none other than the king of wine himself, is appeased by being given a woman (a symbolic Ariadne) and is resurrected, with the rest of nature, by her embrace. During the festival it was said the shadows of the dead were walking the earth, and is the cause for the ritual drinking contest to be held in silence.

The collective experience that life and nourishment result from terror, the encounter with death, sacrifice, destruction, and restoration, binds Dionysos' followers together and adds a new dimension to their lives.

Resources:

Ancient Mystery Cults - Walter Burkert
Greek Religion - Walter Burkert
Dionysos: Myth and Cult - Walter Otto
Old Stones, New Temples - Drew Campbell
Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life - Karl Kerényi
Thiasos Dionysos - www.winterscapes.com/thiasos

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Spring Festivals

by Oenochoe

Anthesteria (March 2-4) This "festival of flowers" is a feast of the dead and a drinking festival in honor of Dionysos Limnaios. The first day, Pithoigia, marks the opening of new wine jars. The second day, Khoes, is for drinking contests. Then later that evening, a sacred marriage is performed between Dionysos and a priestess (in ancient times, the queen). The last day, Khutroi, is devoted to the cult of the dead. Panspermia offerings (dishes of cooked vegetables and seeds) are left out for the wandering spirits, and precautions are taken to prevent those spirits from coming too close to living humans. At the end, an offering is made to Hermes Psukhopompos, and the dead spirits are driven out.

Diasia (March 14) A festival of Zeus Meilikhios (kindly), the chthonic Zeus who appears as a snake. Offerings are made of cakes shaped like animals, grains, and other foods. The offerings are burnt entirely to propitiate the god.

Elaphebolia (March 26) A festival of Artemis the huntress, when she is offered cakes shaped like stags, made with honey and sesame seeds.

Asklepia (March 28) A festival of Asklepios, including a large sacrifice and common meal with the god. A good time to ask for, or give thanks for, healing that is needed.

Greater Dionysia (March 29-April 2) In ancient Athens this was the largest of Dionysos' festivals. The god is placed outside of the city and officially escorted in. Then follows a great revel all night long. The rest of the festival is set aside for theatrical performances and contests.

Pandia (April 6) A festival in honor of Zeus, about which little is known.

Mounikhia (May 5) A festival of Artemis as she is associated with the moon. A procession is made of people carrying amphiphontes – round cakes holding lit candles arranged in a circle.

Olympieia (May 8) A festival of Olympian Zeus, including a bull sacrifice. Since this is likely impossible currently, substitutions could be made, such as a clay figurine of a bull, a cake shaped as a bull, or a large steak.

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Spring Festivals *(continued from page five)*

Thargelia (May 24-25) This festival commemorates the birthdays of Apollon and Artemis. On the first day, two people are chosen as pharmakoi (scapegoats), feasted, and then beaten and/or driven from the city to purify the community. This can be done symbolically too. The second day revolves around an offering to Apollon of first fruits, called the thargelos – either a stew of mixed vegetables or loaf of bread made from various grains. Hymn singing contests can also be held.

Plunteria (June 12) In ancient Athens, this festival marked the washing of the statue of Athene Polias. The temple was cleaned, her eternal flame relit, and then priestesses and other women removed the statue's robe and carried the statue to the washing place. Afterwards, the statue was carried back by torchlight procession, ready to be re-clothed with a new robe during the Panathenaia.



To Potnia Athenaia

by Calixto M. Lopez

Oh Mistress Athena!

Your clear eyes pierce the veil of ignorance, you see as clearly as an owl!
Your deft fingers work swiftly at the loom shaping the warp and the weft of the peplos you are making.
Your strong hands shape the clay on the wheel into a fine amphora.
Your aegis and shield guard those whom You claim as Your own with Your might.
Your clear and cunning thought makes the strategy which protects the cities of Men.

Only skillful Hephaistos can rival you in the work of crafts.
You best even mighty Ares at warcraft.
Your wise counsels are sought by and comfort Great Zeus the Highest, Your excellent father.
Your wisdom and guidance aids powerful heroes in war and adventures.
You stand by Your heroes as few of the Blessed Immortals do. Many heroes came through their dangerous trials with Your sure help.
Cunning Odysseus you aided both on the plains of Ilios, and on the wide paths of the Sea. Godlike Diomedes faced Gods Themselves on the field of battle with Your strength to help him. Brave Perseus would have perished without Your guidance.
You give Men your wise gifts, the car, the bridle, the fruitful Olive tree and its versatile oil with its many uses, the swift ships that sail the wine dark sea.
Your city, Athens, truly won great fame under Your tutelage. Her handiworks are famed for their skillful make and artistic beauty to this day. The wisdom of her sages, from Solon to Sokrates to Proclus echo down to us and are studied and wondered at to this day. Her wise generals Miltiades and Themistokles won lasting renown that echoes over the millennia for the defeats that they inflicted on the mighty Persians at Marathon and Salamis. The craftsmanship and mathematical precision (and imprecision) of Your great Temple is a wonder to behold to this day, recognized across the broad Earth, to the point of being imitated in lands unknown even to far-sailing Odysseus and venturesome Pythias.
Your naked beauty was powerful enough to blind the Seer at a glance!
Verily you were a fit candidate for “the most Beautiful” or “the Goodliest” inscribed on the bright gold apple that Eris threw amongst the Gods of Olympos at the wedding of Thetis.

Oh Athena of the flashing eyes, few are Your equal.
Arachne foolishly thought herself your better in the art of weaving. Truly did she pay the price for her hubris.
Truly Alexandros of Ilios faced a difficult choice on the slopes of Mount Ida. All three Goddesses had just claim to the title.
Yet I know which of the three I would have chosen were I in Paris' shoes, oh Mistress Athena!

“No sooner have you grabbed hold of it than myth opens out into a fan of a thousand segments...Everything that happens, happens this way, or that way, or this other way. And in each of these diverging stories all the others are reflected, all brush by us like folds of the same cloth. If, out of some perversity of tradition, only one version of some mythical event has come down to us, it is like a body without a shadow, and we must do our best to trace out that invisible shadow in our minds.”

- Robert Calasso *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*

Communication Matters!

by Dan Adler

Ever feel like you're alone in your desire to worship the Greek Gods? Or that you've got no way to learn more about them? Well, I'm here to tell you that you're mistaken. There are a number of ways to interact with folks, and share ideas. Most of them, right from your computer. There are a number of email groups which have been established for just this purpose, and I've listed a few of them here, in no particular order. In addition to the email groups, there are a number of websites, which provide detailed information, in the form of essays, personal reflections, and much more.

Email Groups

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Hellenismos-Outreach/>

This is a list for discussion of Hellenismos outreach. They are not specific to Hellenion, Ai Mystai, or any other group, but Hellenismos in general. This isn't about some bizarre new flavor of proselytizing or evangelism, of course.

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Hellenion_Chat/

Chat and informal discussion list for members and prospective members of Hellenion. This is the chance for people to get to know each other better, discuss local area events and hopefully keep the main Hellenion list free of chatter.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HellenicPagan/>

This is a list for discussion of the religious practices of the ancient Hellenic world as well as modern religious practices that are in some way based on those. They welcome Reconstructionists, Wiccans, and any other pagans who worship the Greek gods in some way, as well as people who are interested in talking about such worship. This list is for polytheists with explorations into the myths, gods, and ancient practices as well as personal experiences.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HellenicRitual/>

This is a group designed to focus on real world practice of Hellenic Religion. The goal of this group is to collect various rituals, devotions, poems, sources, and ideas on how to practice Hellenismos in today's world. At this time they do not have an affiliation with any specific organization, although contributors may well belong to various organizations.

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Ai_Mystai_Research/

This group is for people who wish to assist in researching ancient Greek esoteric and mystical symbology and philosophy. Examples will include meditation practices, symbolic aspects of various rituals, and philosophy pertaining to spiritual improvement.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Hellenismos-L/>

For discussions on Greek religion, whether it be reconstructionist, Mystery groups, modern day Wiccan or Pagan, academic study, or mythology. They aim to have an intelligent list focused on friendly, thoughtful discussion amongst those who wish to not just talk about their religion, but practice it.

Web Pages

Hands On Hellenismos: <http://uselesspython.com/hellenismos/HandsOnHellenismos.html>

The idea behind Hands-On Hellenismos is to provide practical information about Hellenismos (polytheism more or less in the manner of the people of ancient Greece), how to practice, and what is really going on in Hellenismos today. I hope to keep things relatively simple and approachable. The goal of the author(s) here is to clarify and to help, not to impress you and make you think they are really special.

Hellenion: <http://www.hellenion.org>

A US-based religious organization dedicated to the revival and practice of Hellenic polytheism. We approach Hellenic religion from the reconstructionist perspective, which includes both an emphasis on historical precedent and respect for personal spiritual inspiration. We offer local congregations, study opportunities, and fellowship for those who worship the Olympians and the other deities of ancient Greece in a traditional way.

Tropaion: <http://www.geocities.com/markoulakis82/>

A site built by an Hellenic Polytheist, living in Greece. He provides insight into ideas of Cosmos; Creation Myths; Psychogony; Theogony; Rites & Rituals; and much more.

Greek Sacrifice Ritual: <http://inside.bard.edu/academic/specialproj/ritual/index.html>

A site explaining the whys, hows, and whens of sacrifice rituals in Greek religion. Includes some step-by-step examples of rituals.

Neokoroi: <http://www.winterscapes.com/neokoroi/>

This is us! The Neokoroi are a group of Hellenic Polytheists who feel called to a path of service. We feel it's our job to sweep away the dust, disuse, and misrepresentation of Hellenismos, and to help rebuild and maintain the temples of the Gods.

All of the above listed web pages provide links to even more pages. And from them, you can get to still more pages (sensing a theme here?) and to email groups other than those listed above. It's a given that somewhere, there is something for everyone on the web. Hopefully, this list will help you find what you're looking for.

The Sacred and the Profane in Hellenismos

by Calixto M. Lopez

This article presents my initial conclusions on the topic of the Sacred and the Profane in Hellenismos, a topic which I've become quite interested in since assuming the role (albeit unofficially) as a priest or *Hiereus* of Athena. Scholars and Philosophers of religion have identified the concept of the Sacred or Holy as being central to religion and the religious experience. The Sacred or Holy are, in the words of Rudolph Otto, the "wholly other."ⁱ Things that are Sacred or Holy provide a glimpse of a realm vastly different from our own, and are numinous, which is a sense of the uncanny, of power and mystery set apart from our regular day-to-day mundane existence. These items are also ritually clean or pure. The concept of the sacred has several axes of opposition.ⁱⁱ

The first of these is the opposition between the sacred and the profane (that which is not sacred). The second is the opposition between the clean and the impure or polluted. The third is the opposition between the numinous and the mundane.

The profane can be divided into the Unholy and the mundane. The common or mundane is usually seen as clean and non-numinous; while the Unholy or Polluted is unclean and numinous. The Unholy shares the quality of numinosity with the Holy.ⁱⁱⁱ

Or to simplify:

The Holy: Sacred, Clean and Numinous

The Polluted/Unholy: Profane, Unclean and Numinous

The Common: Profane, Clean and Mundane.

In many cases, the biggest opposition is between the clean and unclean. Pollution and cleansing plays an important role in many religions, including Hellenismos. Other examples of religions with a strong emphasis on purity or cleanliness versus uncleanliness or pollution are Ancient Judaism, the Religio Romana, and Shinto. That which is clean is not in and of itself holy, but is worthy of coming near the holy, or becoming holy itself.^{iv}

The situation is complicated because in English, the term Profane has several meanings, which are not entirely compatible with each other, or with the categories observed in religions and the Philosophy of Religion. The word "Profane" can mean mundane, "not concerned with religion or religious purposes: SECULAR." But it also has a definition that indicates pollution: "serving to debase or defile what is holy." There is also a definition that is mixed "not holy because unconsecrated, impure or defiled: UNSANCTIFIED."^v

The third type is between religious valuations of objects and non-religious value. The Unholy or the Holy are numinous things, which as said before are uncanny and mysterious and powerful. This power is a threat. Both can harm someone. The pollution is usually not sought out but is acquired anyway (usually through spilling of blood, sexual activity,

menstruation, eating unclean foods, etc.). One must take ritual action to remove pollution and its threats, as well as the threat from the holy. The mundane is not dangerous.

The polluted and the holy are a threat to each other. The holy is a definite threat to the unholy, as many tales and myths worldwide express. On the other hand, the polluted is a threat to the holy, as the terms for defiling, and desecration show. Desecration of a temple may not harm the deity, but it will harm the community when the deity is no longer present to bless and protect the community.

All these categories and the effects thereof can be shown to exist in Hellenismos. In ancient Greek, the term *hosia* is a very old adjective, dating back to the time of Homer.^{vi} This term has elements of holiness and purity to it. Originally it refers to an offering, it later becomes broadened.^{vii} *Hosios* is "holy, sacred, pious, devout."^{viii} In many cases, it was defined in a negative sense early on. In the *Odyssey* it is stated that planning a murder is *anosion* or unholy. It is also *anosion* to feel joy in the presence of the corpses of the dead.^{ix} Poseidon Hippios had horses at Onchestos which were *hosia*, and so sacred and unusable by mortals.^x It is *hosia* for the Gods to accept sacrificial offerings.^{xi} Apollon is especially referred to as *hosios* yet He cleanses himself after striking from afar.^{xii} The assistants to the Oracle of Delphi were *hosios*, especially those who performed the animal sacrifices there who were most *hosioi* of men.^{xiii} Plato, in the *Euthyphron* considers *hosiototes* (being *hosia*) to be synonymous with purity and *eusebia*, but even there, he works forward from a murder case.^{xiv}

Hosia is also active; things must be happening, the rituals being performed, and the Gods and the Daimones must receive their offerings for *hosia* to be met.^{xv} Neglect of *hosia* can bring down the wrath of the Gods. On the other hand, to be *hosios* one must simply live per the *nomizomena* of the *polis* one lives in.^{xvi} Thus a rather mundane life is pure in Hellenismos. The term can be applied to places where normal life goes on, where stricter religious rules do no apply.

"Every State building that was no specifically dedicated as a 'holy place,' a *hieron* or sanctuary, formed part of the *hosia*. It is accordingly quite clear that the *hosion* occupies a middle position between the *hieron* and the wholly profane."^{xvii}

From this example, it would be logical to deduce that the *agora* of Athens is *hosia* while the sanctuaries in and around the *agora* are *hieron*^{xviii} as they were demarcated by special boundary markers and the *khernips* (lustration) basins. A higher level of purity was needed to access those areas than the more mundane but clean *agora*.^{xix} In the model I used in the beginning of this paper, the *agora*, and the *hosion* are clean and mundane...or common. Pure and to that extent holy, and capable of approaching the holy, but not as holy or sacred as that which is *hieron*, and belonging wholly to the Gods. However, violations of *hosia* will make one polluted. Those who committed murder and are in the presence of the murder victims are *anosion* and so unfit to call on the Gods.

A related concept, which closely matches the idea of “clean”, is *hagneia*. That which is *hagnos* is “chaste” or “pure” and it is directly opposed to the polluted^{xx}. When one undergoes *katharsis* to remove *miasma* (pollution), one becomes *hagnos*.

The concepts of *hosios* and *hagnos* should be fit into the framework as The Common. It is mundane, and clean and profane (in the sense of unconsecrated and secular).

Let us now consider the numinous elements of the Holy or Sacred and the Profane. The Holy is numinous, and gives a view into the word of the other, the Divine. Otto referred to the Holy as something with *Numen*, a Latin term for “Divine Power, Uncanny, Divine.” In one sense, the *Hieron*, which belongs wholly to the Gods is definitely such a numinous thing.^{xxi} In a more limited sense, it is the sanctuary or *temenos* cut off from the mundane landscape with its boundary markers or wall and the lustration basins at the entrance. Its very nature as something set apart would tend to make it numinous. One would, on approaching it, sense the otherness of the place and the Immortals who dwell there. To enter, one would have to purify oneself by lustration, which further enhances the sensation of entering into the presence of the other, of the divine.

This sense would be reinforced by the fact that many *temenoi* were “cut out” due to some uncanny event signifying the presence or activity of a God.^{xxii} A good example would be the *temenos* of Zeus on Mount Lykaeon. It marked a spot where a thunderbolt had struck the earth. That is a direct and visible manifestation of the *Numen* or Power of Zeus Kataibates, Zeus the Descender. It was common in the world of the Ancient Greeks to set aside such sites as sacred to Zeus. On Mount Lykaeon, the uncanny nature of the place was reinforced by tales that said no shadows were cast within the sanctuary, and anyone staying overnight there would disappear. Many other sanctuaries were set up around a sacred spring, a sacred stone, or a sacred tree, or places of abnormal beauty, which stimulated feelings that the *Numen* of some God was active at the site.^{xxiii} The uncanny can also be seen in the sanctuaries of Asklepios. Here incubation (sleeping) in the sanctuary (specifically the temple itself) leads to dream visitations by the God who shows the sick person how to heal themselves which is itself rather unusual (more so since the dreams seemed to have led to actual cures).

Examples of this are legion in the records from ancient Greece. The Erechtheum in Athens was built around both the sacred Olive Tree, which Athena caused to sprout, and the salt spring dug by Poseidon’s trident in their competition for patronage of Athens. The sacred springs and associated ecstatic gases at Delphi are another famous example, the sanctuary arising due to the uncanny power of prediction the gases from the springs caused. The cave of Eileithia was a sanctuary from early Minoan times to the very end of the Roman era; partially at least due to the uncanny stalactites and stalagmites within it which resemble a female human, and the relationship of the cave to the birth canal which is itself appropriate for the Birthing Nymph.^{xxiv}

The most holy images of the Gods were not the great chryselephantine sculptures of Phidias and others, but the strange wooden xoanoi, (sing. xoanon).^{xxv} The Peplos, which

was woven and carried in the great procession to the Acropolis, was not for the great statue in the Parthenon, but the ancient olivewood xoanon of Athena housed in the Erechtheum, said to have fallen from the sky. Other xoanoi were said to wash up from the sea, or arose from the ground; while various Palladion had fallen from the sky to Troy, Argos and Rome. The unusual origin or discovery of these objects, and the fact that they had no known maker made these the holiest and most prized possessions of the cities that held them.^{xxvi} Once again, the uncanny strikes again.

The uncanny nature of the place or object, the *Numen*, is, as in many religions, dangerous as well. They are dangerous even to the normal and pure (or even purified) persons. The holy bodies of the Gods (or the sheer power inherent in them) can in themselves smite a mortal. Zeus, in his unmasked form, burned Semele to cinders. The mere sight of Athena while bathing caused the seer Teiresias to go blind (in one version of the story); while the sight of Artemis bathing stimulated Her to turn Akteon into a stag to be hunted by his own hounds. The full force of a God’s *Numen* (or *Hieron*) is more than a mere mortal can bear. The *Numen* of Zeus at Lykaeon could make mortals disappear.

Anathemata (Dedicated offerings or votive offerings) were also hedged about with restrictions.^{xxvii} They were removed from normal use (often being broken) and after a while were often buried in the sanctuary when too many had accumulated. Anathemata were only handled by the priest/ess of the sanctuary and his or her assistants. This was partially out of sacrifice, and partially out of concern for what would happen if they were used for profane purposes. Theft of anathemata was usually the cause of much sorrow and grief for the thief. The Gods do not take lightly the theft of Their property. In the *Odyssey*, when the men of Ithaca steal the sacred cattle of Helios, they doom themselves to destruction despite their desperation.

These dangers led to ritual restrictions such as those found in other societies and religions. These restrictions serve to fortify and protect those who enter the strange places of the Holy. Common rituals involve divination (to ensure the Divine Beings are in favor of a rite). Other restrictions involve ritual purification (such as the baths in the Castalian Spring of the Pythia; or the simple Khernips ritual of the average person), to restrictions on who could enter the sanctuary, what clothes they wore, and so forth. Those in intimate connection with the Holy, such as priests and attendants had to make doubly sure they were pure and clean of pollution. Death, sexual intercourse, and certain other polluting activities were prohibited within the bounds of the *temenos*.^{xxviii} This was partially to protect the *temenos* from desecration, as these polluting events would certainly desecrate the sanctuary and require purification rites. But it was also to prevent harm to the poor souls who angered the Gods by their desecration. In the myth of Medusa, Poseidon seduced the priestess of Aphrodite in Aphrodite’s temple. As a result Medusa was cursed to become a Gorgon. Jason’s father was murdered in Hera’s temple by Jason’s uncle, who for this desecration doomed himself at Jason’s hands, and those of the outraged Goddess.

continued on page ten

Sacred and Profane (continued from page nine)

Thus we can clearly see the numinous, and clean nature of the sacred, or holy in Hellenismos. Once again, this clearly fits the model presented above. We also can see the dangers that the Holy can bear for both the mundane, and the profane; as well as the dangers that the profane have on the holy.

The profane, or unholy, or polluted is relatively simple to trace in Hellenismos. The term for pollution is miasma. Miasma can range from simple dirtiness, as in the Iliad, when Hera washes the miasma of dirt from Herself in preparation to seduce Zeus; to the case where the Argive troops bathe in the sea to wash their miasma away in preparation for a sacrifice to Apollon. Other sources of pollution include sexual activity, childbirth and bloodshed.^{xxix} As in many cultures, miasma spreads by contagion. Someone who is clean who contacts someone who had sex, shed blood, or bore a child becomes polluted. As a result, persons polluted by bloodshed were often excluded from the city, as was the case of Oedipus and Orestes.^{xxx} Priests could not enter the homes of women who had borne children, as they would become polluted and unable to fulfill their duties until cleansed. Rituals of purification were carried out to cleanse people of pollution, the most elaborate being reserved for those who shed blood, and those being initiated into Mysteries (which consecrated them, and thus required elaborate purification, at Eleusis this involved being purified by sea water, fire and air).^{xxxi}

Pollution or miasma in itself was dangerous. Illnesses, deformities and calamities befell the polluted. The cities in which they resided were in danger. Oedipus, having killed his father brought a plague on the city of Thebes due to his pollution. The threat of pollution from bloodshed was so severe that in Athens, the King Archon (Archon Basileus) presided over cases of murder to detect and cleanse the pollution from the city; and elaborate scapegoat rituals took place in many places to remove pollution periodically.

Thus we can clearly see that the polluted or profane was present in Hellenismos as well, and fits the model developed above.

“All humans must pay the debt of death, nor is there any mortal who knows whether he shall be alive tomorrow; learning this clearly, O man, make thee merry, keeping the wine-god close by thee for oblivion of death, and take thy pleasure with the Paphian while thou drawest thy ephemeral life; but all else give to Fortune's control.”

-Palladas

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ⁱ Kelley 1999

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Kerényi 1962 p. 108

^{vii} Ibid. p. 109

^{viii} Betts & Henry 1989, p. 324

^{ix} Kerényi 1962. p. 108

^x Ibid.

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} Ibid. p. 109

^{xiii} Ibid.

^{xiv} Ibid. cf. Plato, Euthyphro

^{xv} Ibid.

^{xvi} Ibid.

^{xvii} Ibid. p. 110

^{xviii} Adkins & Adkins 1997 p. 337 Note, *Hieron* while usually applied to a sanctuary, literally means full of divine power, and is thus rather equivalent in a descriptive form to *Numen* or Numinous.

^{xix} Ibid. p. 338

^{xx} Betts & Henry 1989, p. 295

^{xxi} See footnote xviii.

^{xxii} Burkert 1985 p. 86, note *Temenos* means “cut out.” It is not always set in a place where the uncanny occurred or occurs, but that is very common. Cf. Also p. 85 “If ever a breath of divinity betrays some spot as the sphere of higher beings, then this is evoked by the institutionalized cult.” Cf also, Rice & Stambaugh 1979 p. 123

^{xxiii} Ibid. p. 85

^{xxiv} Castleden 1990, p. 61 discusses Minoan sanctuaries and their characteristics in detail in the chapter on Religious Life pp.123-157. Pages 59-62 discusses cave sanctuaries such as Eleuthia's (Eileithia's) at Amnisos.

^{xxv} Ibid. p. 90

^{xxvi} Ibid. p. 91

^{xxvii} Ibid. p. 92-95, the whole section deals with *anathemata* in some detail.

^{xxviii} Ibid. p. 78

^{xxix} Ibid.

^{xxx} Ibid. p. 81

^{xxxi} Ibid. p. 80

Amphiphontes Recipe

by Jennifer

During the festival of Mounikhia (see Spring Festivals in this issue), sacred to the Goddess Artemis, there is a procession in which people carry round cakes called amphiphontes (“shining both ways” or “shining all around”), each topped with a circle of candles. These cakes would be set between two torches, which symbolized the moonrise and moonset. Perhaps these cakes are the forefathers of the modern day cup cake!

I chose a wheat-bread recipe because this festival is so close to Thargelia, a festival celebration which honors its Gods and its feasters with a loaf of bread or a stew made from the first harvest.

Whole-Wheat Bread

4 cups warm potato water
6 tbsp melted Crisco (warm only) (2-tbsp for greasing bowl)
3 cups stone ground flour
6-8 cups whole-wheat flour

Yeast Preparation

2 tbsp yeast
2 tsp sugar
1 cup warm water
Let this mixture stand for 3-4 minutes until foamy

- In a large bowl, place 3-cups stone-ground flour and 2-cups whole-wheat flour.
- Add salt and stir.
- Add warm (not hot) potato water, warm melted shortening and the yeast mixture.
- Mix with a wooden spoon, beating until dough becomes elastic and free from lumps.
- Add the remaining 4-6 cups of whole-wheat flour

NOTE: If a thumb indent is left in the dough, it has enough flour. If the indent closes too fast, go ahead and add more flour.

- Add 2-tbsp melted shortening to grease the bottom and sides of bowl to prevent the dough from sticking.
- Place a lid on bowl and let rise for 45 minutes to 1 hour.
- Punch down (Grease hands to prevent sticking)
- Let dough rise again.
- After dough has risen a second time, divide and shape into loaves; place into small round bread pans.
- Let rise in bread pans until double in size
- Bake in a pre-heated 350°-375° oven for 35-45 minutes or until golden brown
- Turn out onto racks to cool

Once cooled, top each loaf with a circle of candles – birthday candles work well.

Makes 4 loaves

"If you have ever come on a dense wood of ancient trees that have risen to an exceptional height, shutting out all sight of the sky with one thick screen of branches upon another, the loftiness of the forest, the seclusion of the spot, your sense of wonderment at finding so deep and unbroken a gloom out of doors, will persuade you of the presence of a deity. Any cave in which the rocks have been eroded deep into the mountain resting on it, its hollowing out into a cavern of impressive extent not produced by the labours of men but the result of the processes of nature, will strike into your soul some kind of inkling of the divine. We venerate the source of important streams; places where a mighty river bursts suddenly from hiding are provided with altars; hot springs are objects of worship; the darkness or unfathomable depth of pools has made their waters sacred." – Seneca



Colouring Book by Laren - <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/2962/>

Our next issue will be coming out in June '04. The deadline for submissions is May 10th. Possible essay topics include – rituals for upcoming festivals; recipes for sacred foods; reviews of books, websites, and other resources; an interview with a community member; relevant events in the news; discussion of a particular god or myth; or anything else you can think up! See page two for contact information if you'd like to contribute a piece of writing, subscribe for a full year of issues, distribute the newsletter in your area, or submit any comments or questions.

And be sure to check out the Neokoroi website at <http://www.winterscapes.com/neokoroi/>
~ we have even more articles online, as well as information on the gods, photos, links and more!