



Η ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ

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One from Many: Thoughts on the Future of the Hellenic Polytheist Community

by Sannion

Geography helped shape the character of the Greek people. The land is comprised primarily of a series of daunting, rugged mountain ranges such as Parnassos, which rises to a height of 8,061 ft. In between these mountains lie tiny valleys of arable land which the Greek peasants toiled constantly upon in order to maintain a subsistence living. It wasn't just mountains, however, which contributed to the isolation of the Greek people, but also rivers and forests and the ever-present sea coast. As a result of this, Greece developed many independent city-states or *poleis*, each with its own laws, political systems, religious customs, and cultural traditions. Independence and a rugged individuality persisted, even when a measure of political hegemony was attained, as during the various Confederations and Leagues that rose up as a result of the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars, and later under the *Pax Romana*. The Greeks loved to argue, and would spend hours debating the minutest details of a philosophical problem in the various Agoras and Forums which served as the heart of the city. One almost gets the impression that they loved argument for argument's sake, indifferent to any greater quest for truth and understanding - although the ancients would have rightfully heaped scorn on such a view.

Some things never change. We who honor the ancient Greeks as our cultural ancestors have maintained this tradition of debate

and critical inquiry, and cling to the same concepts of the individual as the basic unit of society, and his fundamental and inalienable right to dictate the course of his life on his own terms. This is apparent to anyone who gives the community a passing glance, especially if they happen to observe the various online groups which serve as our modern-day Agora and the websites that members so passionately maintain which articulate our basic philosophies and approaches to religion.

Within our community, you can find proponents of practically every view under the sun. For instance, there are those who maintain that the Gods are distinct, multiple beings with their own likes and dislikes, and that each culture had its own family of Gods who were completely different from those of other cultures, a view which is commonly referred to as hard polytheism. Then there are those who believe that the number of great Gods, while truly multiple, is in no-wise infinite, and that the same beings were known in different lands by different names and worshipped according to different customs, a view which is commonly referred to as soft or practical polytheism. Additionally, there are those who do not ascribe to a polytheistic view at all, but maintain that there is a single divine being, Plato's One or the Good, of which the various national Gods are but aspects or different names,

(continued on page two)

Contents

Essays

- One From Many: Thoughts on the Future of the Hellenic Polytheist Community.....1
- Divination: A Hellenic Perspective.....3
- On Persephone's Grief.....5
- On Being a Neokoros.....8

Poetry/Hymns

Zeus and His Names.....7

Miscellaneous

- Public Shrine Profile.....5
- Summer Festivals.....8
- Book Review.....9

Artwork

Hekate Painting.....12

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, rituals, 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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We have even more articles online, as well as information on the gods, photos, links and more!

Our next issue will be coming out in September 2005. The deadline for submissions is August 20th. Advertising space is also available.

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One from Many... (continued from page one)

united - as with all creation - in this ultimate source of being, a belief that is commonly referred to as monism or monolatry. And still others hold that the only God is man, and that the various mythological Gods are just symbolic, archetypal representations of his complex personality, to be understood and manipulated in a quest for self-knowledge and empowerment. This view is commonly referred to as blasphemy and foolishness ... err ... I mean euhemism or Jungian psychoanalysis. It is a testimony to the richness of our cultural heritage that proponents of all of these different views can hearken back to ancient authors in support of their theological stances.

If we cannot agree on such a fundamentally important question as the nature of the Gods, is it really all that surprising that uniformity of opinion eludes us on other matters as well? For instance, there are those who maintain that the hallmark of piety is the continuance of ancient tradition, with as little deviance from this as possible. Others believe that while it is important to ground one's self in the ancient ways, especially to understand how men related to the Gods at that time, and how the Gods related to man, we live in a society that is fundamentally different from that of fifth-century Athens, to say nothing of the largely agrarian Bronze Age society of the Homeric heroes, and that it is important to have a religion that is relevant to our modern lives and understanding. Innovation, especially when there are gaps in our knowledge, is not only necessary but essential, since all things change and evolve over time, or else stagnation and death ensue. Others see no need to ground themselves in the ancient ways at all, feeling that only the Gods matter, and that it is quite acceptable to worship them within a thoroughly modern religious framework such as Wicca or Ceremonial Magick, or to have no framework at all. This, naturally enough, leads into another hot-button issue within our community, namely the role of magic and mysticism. There are those who want absolutely nothing to do with them, feeling that magic is delusional, contrary to nature, antithetical to traditional values, and hubristic in the face of the Gods. They often also maintain that while the mysteries were important, if marginal, parts of ancient religion, we have very little actual knowledge of their content, and our community is not yet ready to reproduce them, especially since these were not the construction of man, but a revelation conferring a special blessing and status by the Gods. Others maintain that magic has always had a place within Greek religion from the earliest times when men performed ceremonies to promote fertility and the growth of their crops, to control the weather, to induce or repel love, etc. up to the last flowering of Hellenic culture with the Neoplatonic Theurgic circle of the Emperor Julian, that it only appears to violate natural law because we do not fully comprehend the world around us, and that it can lead to a richer, fuller understanding of the Gods which is by no means impious. The defenders of the mysteries often maintain that the mysteries weren't something outside of mainstream religion, but rather a richer, deeper understanding of it, that even if we are not fully informed of the contents of the ancient mystery rites, it is always possible that the Gods will reveal new mysteries to us, and some feel a call to revive them and a dawning awareness of what they may be, and feel certain that they are in a position to inform us that the Gods still offer the same blessings and changed status as they did for our ancestors.

I could continue in this vein for quite some time, as there are many important issues facing our community. Some of the more divisive ones include the practice of animal sacrifice, the role of the philosophers in shaping our religious heritage, our relationship within the broader Pagan spectrum and whether that term even applies to us, how UPGs (Unqualified Personal Gnosis) are to be evaluated, what our relationship to modern Greece should be, the role of priests within our tradition, as well as numerous other issues. However, it is not my intention within this article to provide a grocery list of important issues facing the modern Hellenic Polytheist community, but rather to praise the diversity within that community. For I truly think that it testifies to the beauty, strength, truth, and richness of our religious community and its cultural heritage that it can maintain such diverse and complex views simultaneously.

Too often, religion is rendered down to a few easily palatable axioms which require no thought and provide no challenge as they are digested. Hellenismos, however, is engaged in a genuine and difficult struggle to unravel the truth, and wrestles over these perplexing issues with a commendable fortitude. It is natural that people of different temperaments and different experiences should come to different conclusions, and it speaks well of the community that divergent views are not only permitted to exist, but given their own validity

(continued on page ten)

Divination: A Hellenic Perspective

by Aristotimos

*Come O shining ones,
Graceful daughters of the land.
Lord Apollo leads you into the dance
And Hermes joins in the swift movement
Of thy feet.*

Divination and oracles were an established fact of ancient Greek life. These practices varied from one place to another in form and appearance. The idea of trying to reconstruct what the standard Greek response to such things would be is nearly impossible. What little information we have is often contradictory. In such a short space, I cannot even begin to give a survey of the divination and oracle practices of Hellenism.

I will provide some of my own sources and thoughts on these matters. Part one of this article will discuss the practice of casting lots and the reading of omens. I will explore some of the deities involved with this sort of divination. I will also provide examples of my own practice. Part two of this article (appearing in a later issue) will cover the themes of seers and oracles. It is my hope that I can provide you, the reader, with a few facts, some conjecture, and examples that will allow you to begin your own divination or at least give you a better understanding of what is involved with divination within a Hellenic context.

The Homeric Hymn to Hermes is one of the earliest sources that explain where the casting of lots comes from. By the time of its writing, around 700 B.C.E., the casting of lots was an established practice. Under the tutelage of the nymphs, this form of divination was taking place at Delphi at the Korykian Cave. I believe that this portion of the hymn is a literary explanation of how this came to be:

*“For there are certain sisters born, [Thriai]
maidens delighting in their swift wings
three of them...they live in homes under the fold of Parnassus
[Korykian Cave]
far-away teachers of a prophetic skill which I practiced...
But when those eating the yellow honey are inspired
They are willing and eager to speak the truth.
But if they are robbed of the sweet food of the gods,
Then indeed do they tell lies buzzing among one another.”*

- Homeric Hymn to Hermes [552-563]

Elsewhere in the hymn, Apollo tells Hermes that speaking the will of Zeus belongs only to himself. He says that Zeus overlooked this “lower” form of divination. Apollo says, veiled, that an offering of honey will cause the nymphs to speak truly through the casting of lots. He also goes on to say that he has moved on to bigger and better things: oracles. The casting of lots now falls under the patronage of Hermes, taught to him by the nymphs. It is interesting to note that an oracle of chance by the throwing of dice (astragali in ancient times), coins or the turn of a card is given to Hermes, as he is also the god of commerce, luck and gambling.

The archaeological evidence at Delphi tells us many things. Delphi rests at the base of Mt. Parnassus. On the mountain lies the Korykian Cave which is held sacred to the Nymphs, Pan and also to Hermes. Thousands of offerings of knucklebones (astragali) have been found. Other offerings include lamps, amphorae of oil and jars of honey. The Korykian Cave was an established oracle site dedicated to the nymphs at the time of Delphi’s operation. Archaeologists and historians surmise that the Korykian Cave served as the poor man’s Delphi. If one could not afford the cost of sacrifice and the fees at Delphi, they could always go and cast lots at the cave and leave a small offering.

What have we noticed so far about the Greek forms of divination? The Fates determine the length of man’s life. Zeus portions the good and ill to every man. Apollo has sole authority to speak his Father’s will. The nymphs teach small forms of divination, which now fall under the rulership of Hermes. We have learned that *there is a deity involved in every form of divination*. This view of divination is called theomatic. A supplicant seeks to know the will of a god through divinatory means. This view holds that the god or daimon controls the falling of the dice. We can speak of the randomness of the roll of dice or the chance of drawing a tarot card, but if we seek the blessing of a patron or tutelary spirit, we are actually saying that there is no choice. The gods guide the reading. How is that for a paradox?

Let us look at what divination is more deeply. Divination is a passive art. We do not seek to change our futures so much as to peer into them. Most pagans I know who practice the mantic arts seek guidance rather than fortune telling. Divination makes us receptive to the answers we receive. It allows us a new perception and opens us up to what is hidden from plain sight. The Greek word *kairos* means “the right moment;” this outlook tells us that every moment is unique, and contains its own qualities. Each moment is also organic and interconnected. The moment not only contains itself, but all past actions that lead to it. Kairos is also our own moment of observation before we make any choices. Divination does not so much seek to predict the outcome as to show us the moment’s inner qualities, which are reflected through words or images. More simply put, divination shows us our previous course and where it is taking us. It does not map out a certain and unchangeable future.

Many ancient writers believed that the power of divination was an innate power of the soul. The ability to access this was hindered by the physical body and also our conscious minds. Aristotle, Plutarch and Cicero all write similar commentaries to this effect. Divination was possible only when one

(continued on page four)

Divination... (continued from page three)

overcame these hindrances by various means. When freed, the soul got some elbow room, and could get to it. Sleep and dreaming, trance, possession and religious ritual were all used to access the higher functions of spirit. These could be combined in many ways: the dream incubations for healing at the shrines of Asclepius or the ritual offering of honey during divination to the nymphs. Divination may be a passive art, but it can become an active form of worship.

Another aspect of divination is the reading of omens, which is the art of observing natural and unnatural signs within the environment around you. An omen could be the flight of a bird (augury), lightning striking a tree, or even a sneeze. Within the context of Greek sacrificial ritual, everything becomes an omen. From the way an animal processes to the altar, to the flashing of the fire, each of these has an established meaning to those who can read them.

In antiquity, there was a long tradition of what an omen might mean. The meaning was culturally specific, much like today. If a black cat crosses our path in the U.S. it is considered unfortunate. In England, this is considered a sign of good fortune. We can only infer what certain things may have meant to the ancient Greeks. A tree struck by lightning is either blessed or cursed by Zeus. Zeus = lightning = struck tree = touched by Zeus. Hermes = messenger = phone rings = Hermes blesses my request. We use the process of associations to riddle out what each thing may mean. To quote Willow Moon, "The theory of synchronicity states that two things that occur together are organically connected. Which is to say, that events occurring together are naturally and strongly linked, because the rise out of a contiguous matrix of event. If you can understand the connection between concurrent events, then you can understand the meaning of the event." If the average Greek knew an event was significant, but he was still stumped, he might ask a seer or priest for an explanation or a divination.

Here is a page taken from my own life. I celebrated a feast to Artemis recently. Everything appeared to be going well. At the conclusion of the ritual I dropped a libation glass and it shattered into several pieces. I could assume that I was being clumsy. However, my intuition said that this was a significant event. It *felt* important. I had the idea that Artemis was informing me of something.

With this foreboding, I entered my ritual room and took out my dice. I said a short prayer to Hermes to guide my throw and asked Apollo to grant me clear sight. I wrote my question down on a sheet of paper and used the Homeric Oracle to answer it. The response was "*Would that they now eat their last and final meal here.*" I gathered that Artemis did not want me to offer another sacrificial feast in her honor. I recorded my responses, said a prayer of thanksgiving to Hermes, Artemis and Apollo and put everything away. In a more formal ritual I might have

burned incense, poured libations or left an offering. I still felt unsettled and asked a fellow diviner to perform his own divination on the matter. As a diviner myself, I am often too close to my own situations to get an accurate reading. I find having another person performing divinations in concert with mine to be very useful.

I used the Homeric Oracle to allow the gods to speak to me. I did not ask the gods to predict the future, through the casting of lots. I used divination to look at the causes of a situation and what might be done to correct any mistakes on my own part. A common practice for me is to ask which god or goddess would be appropriate to work with in resolving a personal situation. I don't necessarily decide to sacrifice to Hephaistos, the god of technology, just because my car breaks down. Rather I let the gods decide the best course of action or the guidance I need.

Divination can be used as an aid to decision making. Gaining another perspective on my troubles gives me new avenues to explore. Maybe Hermes is a better god to resolve my transportation problems. Maybe Hestia wants me to carpool with friends instead. Self-knowledge becomes more important than foreknowledge. The oracle or divination informs me what I need to do or what I need to avoid, but does not tell me what the outcome of my action will be.

The emphasis in this sort of divination is one of openness. Divination becomes sacred under the guidance of the gods. I speak, and then allow the gods to speak in return. Right action, or orthopraxy, becomes the main concern. Divination never renounces my own moral responsibility. With greater reflection and self-knowledge I am led to make better choices. I cannot say, "Oh well, this is my fate and there is nothing I can do." How I act in a situation is always my responsibility and sometimes my burden. We can ask the gods for guidance, but the foot work is up to us.

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To Bacchus, to the Nymphs and rural Pan
these from old Biton the Arcadian.
For Pan this new-born kid, no more to play
beside his mother, ivy from the spray
for Bacchus, for the Nymphs these crimson roses,

and all the blooms September's shade discloses.
And do you, Bacchus, Pan and Nymphs incline
to bless my house with water, milk and wine.

-Leonidas of Tarentum or Gaetulicus

Public Shrine Profile

by Thista Minai

Location of shrine, and god(s) it is dedicated to:

Kataleos is a shrine or temple of Artemis located in my home in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

When did you first create this shrine?

Kataleos was established in August of 2004.

Did you create this primarily for yourself, a group, or the general Hellenic community?

I created it for Artemis, as an act of devotion to Her, but had intended it for general public use. Thus far I have not had any visitors outside my own demos, but it remains open to the public, should anyone desire to come.

Describe it:

I put aside one room of my apartment as a temple for Her. The central feature is a statue of Her that I made out of paper mache. It stands at least two feet taller than me. There are other tables and items within the temple, but rather than explain them all here, I direct readers to the website, where I have posted many pictures: <http://artemistemple.tripod.com>

What types of activities, if any, do you perform in the shrine area?

Our demos holds regular reconstructed Athenian festivals, and those held for Artemis take place in her temple. I also give

prayers and offerings and burn incense in the temple, as visitors are welcome to do.

Have other Hellenic pagans visited your shrine yet?

Other members of Demos Oreiaddon have visited the temple, and participated in a festival held there. A few outside the demos have visited the temple as well; some were friends visiting my house, and others were Hellenic pagans who attended our demos' ritual.

Any future plans for the shrine, such as expansion or changes?

The temple is an ongoing project. As opportunity arises, I will continue to improve on it. At the moment the biggest hindrance is space, as the room I used to create it is quite small. The temple website, now hosted by tripod, will soon be moved to a different, less spam-infested server. I will announce this on the tripod site, and give the location of the new homepage as soon as I know what it will be. In June I will begin a prayer service for those who are unable to visit the temple in person. Complete details and instructions will be posted on the temple website.

Contact information for those who might like to visit the shrine:

If you wish to contact me in regards to the temple, send an email to templecataleos@yahoo.com.

On Persephone's Grief

by Gitana

*"But those at whose hands Persephone accepts atonement for (her) ancient grief, their souls in the ninth year she sends up again to the sun of this world; wherefrom spring proud kings, men of strength and speed and those chief in wisdom, and for all time to come they are called of men holy heroes."*¹

This is a very intriguing passage. What exactly is this "ancient grief" of Persephone? Mainstream Greek mythology gives us no clues as to what Pindar was referring when he wrote this. It is only when we turn to the Orphic literature and beliefs that we can begin to unpack the meaning in this quotation.²

Let us look at the passage: souls of the departed are "sent up again to the sun." Often in the ancient literature the Underworld is described as a place where there is no sunlight. To be "in the sun" means to be on earth. Thus, the souls are returned to earth, i.e. they are reincarnated. Nilsson agrees, bluntly saying "This is

metempsychosis clear and outspoken."³ Once we have established this it becomes obvious that we are dealing with non-mainstream beliefs, and Orphism is the most likely context.⁴

We now turn to the idea of atonement. From the wording of the passage it is not that each person individually is subjected to this atonement. All humans collectively have the same accountability and face the same consequences. Furthermore, what we have done is cause for Persephone to grieve.

On Persephone's Grief (continued from page five)

Given all this information, the only explanation we can give is embodied by the myth of Dionysos Zagreus.⁵ I summarize it here:

Persephone was impregnated by her father Zeus who had transformed himself into a serpent. The result of that union was the baby Dionysos Zagreus. It was foretold that Zeus would pass his position of King of the Gods onto this son. The Titans, already angry with Zeus for dethroning his father Kronos, took their revenge out on Dionysos Zagreus: they caught hold of the child and violently dismembered him. Afterwards they first boiled and then roasted the pieces, and feasted. One piece, however, was not eaten, namely his heart. Athena found this remaining piece, and hid it in a covered basket, which she then brought to Zeus. Zeus, furious at what had been done to his youngest child, struck the Titans with his thunderbolts, and set them ablaze. Their bodies were reduced to ashes. The race of humans was created out of these ashes; thus our constitution is part Titanic (due to the bodies of the Titans) and part Dionysian or divine (due to the dismembered god being in their stomachs). The story continues on from here, but this is the only part we are concerned with for the present discussion.

If we consider Pindar's passage in the context of the above Orphic myth, the meaning becomes clear. Persephone grieves for her murdered son. Even though technically it was the Titans who killed Zagreus, humans must atone for this sin because they inherit the guilt from their Titan ancestors. Plato also uses the phrase of "Titanic nature of which our old legends speak" in describing humans who have contempt for oaths and religion.⁶ There seems to be no other myth which can account for such an understanding.⁷ As H.J. Rose explains, "if there was no story in which a son (or other person closely enough related to Persephone for her to wish to receive satisfaction for his death or injury) was murdered or otherwise mishandled by men or some beings connected with men, I can see no meaning at all in the crucial words of the fragment."⁸

There is also a passage from Plutarch which is quite pertinent to our discussion. He says,

"It would perhaps not be wrong to begin and quote lines of Empedocles as a preface... For here he says allegorically that souls, paying the penalty for murders and the eating of flesh and cannibalism, are imprisoned in mortal bodies. However, it seems that this account is even older, for the legendary suffering of dismemberment told about Dionysos and the outrages of the Titans on him, and their punishment and their being blasted with lightning after having tasted of the blood, this is all a myth, in its hidden inner meaning, about reincarnation. For that in us which is irrational and disorderly and violent and not divine but demonic, the ancients used the name, "Titans," and the myth is about being punished and paying the penalty."⁹

Now, it is of utmost importance for humans to atone for their guilt. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* Hades says, "Those who defraud you and do not appease your power with offerings, reverently performing rites and paying fit gifts, shall be punished evermore."¹⁰ In the *Phaedrus* it says that families can be affected by terrible sickness due to "some ancient sin" and that the only way to cure it is "rites and means of purifications."¹¹ But it is not

only bodily sickness which can affect us. Additionally in the *Republic* Plato says that Orphic priests "can expiate and cure with pleasurable festivals any misdeed of a man or his ancestors."¹² A few lines later he explains that such rituals "deliver us from evils in that other world while terrible things await those who have neglected to sacrifice."¹³ It is what awaits us in the afterlife that is of greatest concern.

Orphic teachings explain that upon one's death the soul is taken to the Underworld. There we meet the Queen of the Underworld, Persephone herself. One of the Orphic tablets describes this meeting:

"Pure I come from the pure, Queen of those below the earth; and Eukles and Eubouleus and the other gods and daimons; For I boast that I am of your blessed race.

I have paid the penalty on account of deeds not just; Either Fate mastered me or the Thunderer, striking with his lightning.

Now I come, a suppliant, to holy Persephoneia, that she, gracious, may send me to the seats of the blessed."¹⁴

Again, we see this theme of paying the penalty, although what the "unjust deeds" are it does not say. Another Orphic text, which is surely related, is the *Derveni Papyrus*, in which we read, "This is why the magi perform the sacrifice, as if they were paying a penalty."¹⁵ Another Gold Leaf says that the soul has escaped "the dire cycle of deep grief."¹⁶ Obviously, then, the theme of paying the penalty is quite common in the Orphic literature.¹⁷

Further, the departed person is to declare to Persephone that they are of her "blessed race," i.e. that they are also divine, or at least partly so. This also can be explained by the Zagreus myth, in which humans are a mixture of both the remains of the Titans and Dionysos. This theme is probably the most common in all of the Gold Leaves. One often quoted line among modern pagans, "I am the child of Earth and starry Heaven," comes from the "B series" Orphic Gold Leaves of the 2nd C. BC.¹⁸

Another Gold Leaf says "Tell Persephone that Bakkhios himself has set you free."¹⁹ In discussing this line, R. Parker writes, "What is Dionysus to Persephone? The answer surely lies in the Orphic myth, in regard to which the soul is urged to use an *a fortiori* argument: 'guilty though I am before Dionysus, the mother of the victim can have no complaint against me, since the victim himself has released me.'²⁰ Olympiodorus also speaks of Dionysos as the one who frees souls of ancestral crimes: "That Dionysos is responsible for release and because of this the god is called 'Deliverer.' And Orpheus says: 'People send perfect hecatombs in all seasons throughout the year and perform rites, seeking release from unlawful ancestors. But you, having power over them, you will release whomever you wish from harsh suffering and boundless frenzy.'²¹

But how is it that Dionysos will choose who to release? The Orphics have a clear answer: those who have been initiated. Bremmer describes the ancient guilt as "a guilt which had to be atoned for and which was atoned for – presumably by

(continued on page seven)

On Persephone's Grief (continued from page six)

initiation – before the deceased could enter the abode of the blessed.”²² Once this guilt has been atoned for, the soul will not suffer more incarnations. Another recently-discovered text says, “Enter the holy meadow. For the initiate has paid the price.”²³ So, clearly, in order to pay the penalty one must be an initiate of the Orphic Mysteries.

For an initiate, upon her death, the soul will travel to the Underworld. There, being armed with the correct things to say, thanks to the Gold Leaves that were buried with the body, and having received the proper initiations, the soul can convince Persephone that she has paid the price of the ancestral guilt. The soul is then permitted to enter the “seats of the blessed” as it is called in the Gold Leaf from Thuri. Other texts may use slightly different wording, but the same meaning is obvious. For the soul to be released from the reincarnation cycle and come to final rest among the other blessed souls was the ultimate goal of an Orphic's life. Thus we have come to an understanding on Pindar's passage, and the context in which it was written.

Notes

¹ Pindar *Dirges* Frag. 133

² The inspiration for this essay comes from Herbert J. Rose, “The Grief of Persephone,” *Harvard Theological Review* 36, 1943, pp.247-250. The argument made here I believe is stronger, due to more recently discovered texts, namely the Derveni Papyrus and the 4thC. Gold Leaf from Thessalian Pherae.

³ Nilsson, Martin, “Early Orphism and Kindred Movements,” *Harvard Theological Review* 28, 1935, p. 214.

⁴ There is another fragment of Pindar (frag. 131b) about which J. Bremmer says, “We do not know the audience in front of which Pindar sang these lines, but we are probably not very wrong when we suspect it to have had Orphic or Pythagorean

sympathies.” (Bremmer, Jan, “Orphism, Pythagoras, and the Rise of the Immortal Soul,” in *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife: The 1995 Read-Tuckwell Lectures at the University of Bristol*, Routledge, New York, 2002, p. 23.)

⁵ About the Orphic myths, M. Nilsson comments, “Orphism developed ever more the propensity for weird myths which appears in Hesiod; they suited the mystic tendency of this religious movement.” (Nilsson, Martin, “Early Orphism and Kindred Movements,” *Harvard Theological Review* 28, 1935, p. 201)

⁶ Plato, *Laws*, Bk. III 701b-c

⁷ For arguments against the antiquity of this myth, see Edmonds, Radcliffe, “Tearing Apart the Zagreus Myth: A Few Disparaging Remarks on Orphism and Original Sin,” *Classical Antiquity* 8:1, 1999, pp. 35-73.

⁸ Rose, p. 248.

⁹ Plutarch, *De Esu Carn.* 1.996b-c

¹⁰ *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 364-369

¹¹ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 244 d-e.

¹² Plato, *Republic*, Bk. II 364b

¹³ *Ibid.*, 365a

¹⁴ From Thuri, 4th C. BC

¹⁵ Derveni Papyrus Column VI, as translated by Gábor Betegh, *The Derveni Papyrus: Cosmology, Theology and Interpretation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004.

¹⁶ Also from Thuri, 4th C. BC

¹⁷ One of the major ritual functions of the Orphic priests (*Orpheotelestai*) was performing purifications.

¹⁸ The text is available on my website at this URL: <http://persephones.250free.com/from-man.html>

¹⁹ From Pelinna, 4th C. BC

²⁰ Parker, Robert, “Early Orphism,” in *The Greek World*, ed. Anton Powell, Routledge, New York, 1995, p. 498.

²¹ OF 232 (Olympiodorus)

²² Bremmer, p. 22.

²³ Gold Leaf found in Thessalian Pherai from 4th C BC.



Zeus and His Names

by Alexandra Ellhnopoula

The God of rain is Zeus Ombrios

Of good advice is Zeus Boulaios

Of property is Zeus Ktesios

Community is Zeus Philios

Also Hikesios or even Phatrios

Another name is Zeus Xenios.

Of marriage is Zeus Gamelios

Gives plenitude Zeus Teleios

God of cities, Zeus Polieus

The great king, Zeus Basileus.

The God of lightning is Zeus Keraunos

Husband of Hera is Zeus Heraios

The God of honey is Zeus Melichios

The dark side is Zeus Chthonios.

If he descends, He's Kataibates

If gathers clouds, Nepheligeretes

With other names He is called

But be this God always adored.

Summer Festivals (from ancient Athens)

by Oenochoe

July 7th: **Athenian New Year** (1 Hekatombaion) Sacrifices to Zeus the Savior and Athene the Savior on the night before, the last day of the old year, to ensure good health and prosperity for the coming year.

July 10th: **Aphrodisia** (4 Hekatombaion) The bathing festival of Aphrodite and Peitho (Persuasion). First the temple was purified with dove's blood, then the altars were anointed; then the two statues were carried in a procession to the washing place.

July 18th: **Kronia** (12 Hekatombaion) A festival in honor of Kronos as a god of the harvest, portrayed with a reaping scythe. A huge harvest feast was held, where slaves were invited to dine with their masters.

August 3rd: **Panathenaia** (28 Hekatombaion) The celebration of Athene's birthday, one of the largest festivals in Athens. Every fourth year, the Greater Panathenaia was held, when a new robe was given to the goddess. A huge procession brought the robe to her statue in her temple, where it was placed on Athene's knees, and later stored in the treasury; she was officially re-robed during the Plunteria. Sacrifices were also made to Athene

Hugieia (Health) and Nike. The three or four days following the procession featured contests of sport and art.

August 8th: **Herakleia** (4 Metageitnion – approx.) A celebration of Herakles by athletes in the gymnasium.

September 5th: **Niketeria** (2 Boidromion) A festival in honor of Nike.

September 8th: **Genesia** (5 Boidromion) The Athenian state festival in honor of the dead, especially those who died in wars. (Families usually honored their own dead on the anniversaries of their deaths.)

September 9th: **Kharisteria** (6 Boidromion) The feast of Artemis Agrotera (the huntress). After the victory at Marathon, this became a commemoration of that battle, and was known as Kharisteria, "Thanksgiving."

September 10th: **Boidromia** (7 Boidromion) A festival of thanksgiving for Apollon as a god who rescues people in war.

September 18th: **Eleusinian Mysteries begin** (15 Boidromion)

On Being a Neokoros

by Oenochoe

I've been thinking a lot lately about what it means to be a neokoros. The word is derived from the Greek *naos* (temple) and *koreo* (to sweep), and therefore literally means "temple-sweeper" or more generally "temple keeper." A neokoros was essential to the functionality of a temple, even though he/she occupied a modest position. The duties of a neokoros included not only assuring the cleanliness of the temple and temenos, but also handling the offerings made by supplicants and other daily activity associated with the cult of the god or goddess. A neokoros served the god of the temple in a real and practical manner every day.

So how can this apply to our lives today, when we do not yet have temples for the gods? Well, those of us who feel called to service need to look for alternatives. The most obvious, but most difficult route would be to build a temple or at least large shrine yourself, open it to other worshippers, and tend to it. On a local level, this is already beginning to happen, usually by people opening the shrine rooms in their homes to the public at certain times. But it is not the only way to be a neokoros. Even if you cannot or do not wish to make public your own shrine, it is still a service to the gods to be the keeper of that shrine.

What might the job of neokoros entail today? Creating the shrine in the first place, for one thing. While typically in ancient times

temples were dedicated to only one deity, in these times of fewer temenoi and fewer worshippers altogether, it seems acceptable to build a sacred place for more than one god at a time, so long as they are compatible. On the other hand, there is something to be said for focusing on one god, at least in the role of neokoros. It would at least be simpler to start with one god, their festivals and holy days, their sacred objects, etc., before trying to juggle a bunch of them.

Once the shrine is made, whether it be on top of an end table or the size of a building, it needs to be tended to constantly. There are always offerings to be made, and then cleared away. There is general cleaning, dusting, washing, etc. to be done in order to keep the temenos and the cult items within it pure. There is restocking as supplies such as candles, barley, and libation liquids are used up. Even with a small shrine, this can keep you fairly busy, especially if you begin to create your own holy days for the god involved, start your own traditions, etc. While these activities may seem mundane or just a hassle, I think they can actually be deeply fulfilling. Religion isn't only about the fireworks we sometimes experience in contact with the gods, it isn't only about putting on a wreath and feasting at the festivals. It's about living with the gods all the time, every day. And this is one way to be a part of that, and to show your devotion to the gods.

(continued on page nine)

On Being a Neokoros (continued from page eight)

In addition, one might interpret the concept of neokoros more broadly, and think of it as dedicating oneself to the service of the gods, in whatever form that might take. It might be building a website (even a virtual shrine) to talk about your experience of the gods, or your thoughts about worshipping them. It might be working to form a local demos or thiasos, or hosting a festival. Personally, I consider my work on this newsletter a service to the gods, as it encourages us to think about the them, and hopefully may introduce new people to our religion. The idea is to figure

out where your talents and passions lie, and start there. It can be entirely personal, but I also think there is something special about working for and with the community (locally or worldwide), where our actions may have a more widespread effect.

The gods give us many blessings. Taking on the joy and responsibility of committed service to one or more of them acknowledges their gifts and seeks to give something back to them. And that is what I will be working towards, in whatever ways I can find, as I constantly strive to be a worthy neokoros.



Review of *The Derveni Papyrus: Cosmology, Theology, and Interpretation* by Gábor Betegh

by Gitana

The Derveni Papyrus is an Orphic text that survives from the early 5th C. BC. It was discovered in a tomb in 1962 just north of Thessalonica. Professor Gábor Betegh has written an excellent study of the papyrus. He is an assistant professor of philosophy at the Central European University in Budapest, specializing in ancient philosophy, cosmology, and metaphysics.

The first section of the book is the original but fragmented Greek text accompanied by a translation. He gives numerous footnotes explaining other possible translations for a particular word or phrase. Although there is disagreement among scholars on some of these words, overall this seems to be a sound translation.[1]

Focusing on the discovery of the papyrus itself, the first chapter gives a solid background on the physical evidence surrounding the text. The body of the deceased had been cremated, which was not a normal practice in Makedonia at that time (71). Other scholars have raised the possibility that the Papyrus itself was considered “scrap” and was used to light the funeral pyre. Betegh does not support this view, and he instead argues that the burning of the papyrus was a deliberate part of the funeral ritual (66). This point continues to be under debate.

The second chapter is devoted to the first few columns of the papyrus, which are badly damaged. The author of the Derveni Papyrus (who still remains unknown) seems to be giving an interpretation of rituals in these columns. He speaks of *khoai* for the dead, which consisted of a water and milk mixture (76). Betegh believes that what is being described are actual cult rituals (84).

Chapter three aims to reconstruct the Orphic poem which is the focus of the Papyrus author’s comments from column 7 through the end of the surviving text. Actually, it is not clear if the quotations are from one single Orphic poem, or several (97). The interpretation of this poem (or poems) is the subject of chapter 4. He nicely details the various Orphic theogonies and compares them to what is written in the Derveni Papyrus. The author of the papyrus makes some interesting statements, such as equating Rhea with Demeter, Ge and Hera. Unfortunately we

aren’t able to tell if this is stated in the original Orphic poem being discussed, or if it is the author’s interpretation (164).

The theology of the papyrus is the subject of chapter 5. Here he deals with the One-Many problem.[2] We can see the intimate relation of the author of the Papyrus with the early philosophers, especially the Ionian Presocratics and the Milesian monists.[3] The Papyrus author attempts to solve this problem by identifying many of the traditional gods with one another, saying for example that Kronos and Zeus were “names for the same god” (187). In Col. 22 he equates Ge, Meter, Rhea, Hera and Demeter. This is how he avoids the unsavory understanding of the traditional myth that Zeus rapes his own mother.[4] He also identifies gods with goddesses, saying, as he does in Col. 21, that Zeus is the same as Aphrodite. This is possible because at the time the Papyrus was written common nouns, names, and verb forms were not well distinguished (191-2). Thus Zeus can be called Aphrodite because he does the action of her name, i.e. aphrodise (192).

In Ch. 6 the cosmology is explained. In the beginning was a mixture of everything, much like a hot liquid. The Cosmic Mind (which the Papyrus author equates with Zeus) began to separate out the fiery substance from the others. From this he created the sun and the stars (224). It is only after this separation of fire that the other “elements” can join together to form objects. “The creation of the sun is undoubtedly the crucial moment of the story, triggering off the whole cosmogonical process,” as Betegh puts it (230). However, he also equates the sun with the phallus in Col 13, so perhaps he is explaining the myth of castration (234). He also says the sun and the moon cooperate to form things; the sun “melts” things together, and Night (symbolized by the moon) allows them to cool down, join into forms, and solidify (253).[5] However, the Papyrus author also states that in the future, things will return to this original hot mixture, “floating as they were before” (258). How exactly this is to happen is rather unclear. Somehow the fire principle must dominate over the air principle, to bring about the original mixture again. “The entire dynamics of the author’s cosmogony is based on the air-fire duality” (265). Although he makes mention of all 4 elements, it is clear that only air and fire are “active” principles, and earth and water are passive, and thus not mentioned much in the Papyrus (265).[6]

Book Review (continued from page nine)

Betegh compares the Papyrus author's explanations with Anaxagoras, Diongenes of Apollonia, and Archelaus of Athens in chapters 7 and 8. For lack of space I won't give many details of these two chapters, even though they are excellent. It is important to understand that many scholars have their opinions on who exactly was the author of the Derveni Papyrus. Betegh has concluded in these two chapters that it cannot be any of the ones discussed.

Chapter 9 takes up the connection of physics and eschatology, and Betegh uses both Heraclitus and the Orphic Gold Plates to argue his point.[7] In the surviving text, only Orpheus and Heraclitus are mentioned by name, and the Papyrus contains the earliest known fragment of Heraclitus (325). Betegh, arguing against G. Most, says that of the Gold Plates, it is group A (not group B, as Most suggested) that are the most similar to the Papyrus. In it, Zeus is identified with air, the sun is identified with fire, and earth and water are both rather insignificant, just as in the Derveni Papyrus. Also there may be some connection between cremation and the death by lightening mentioned in the Gold Plates.[8]

Some final but interesting points are made in Chapter 10. In Col. 20 the papyrus author attacks the initiates of other traditions; he says they may go through rites, but that they don't have the proper understanding of what it means. Therefore it is useless (347). Betegh believes that the Derveni Papyrus is not simply a "commentary" as others have suggested. The subject matter is a specific ritual, and the Orphic poem is cited and explained in order to explain the ritual. Thus we have both the *dromena* and *legomena* in the Papyrus (350). There were several professional treatises (or *exegetikon*) written in ancient times, but these were more "pragmatic" and not philosophical as the Derveni Papyrus is (359). In order for the Orphic rituals to be effective, one must have an understanding of "the nature of the soul, the constitution and laws of the physical world, and the way the divinity governs both the soul and the world" (369). The Papyrus author says that Orpheus obscured the "truth" in his teachings on purpose, to prevent the uninitiated from gaining the knowledge. However, the author of the Papyrus also says that he himself is being explicit. Perhaps he thought that only initiates would read his text (370). This certainly would be possible, if Betegh is right that the Papyrus was to be burnt as part of the funeral ritual (66).

The book closes with an appendix which is a critique of R. Janko's theory that Diagoras of Melos is the author of the

Papyrus.[9] Again, for lack of space I will not comment on this section.

On the whole, I found this book to be extremely well-written. Betegh does a fine job of presenting opposing views, as well as giving his own theories. I would not, however, recommend this book to one who is not already familiar with Orphism and also the Presocratic philosophers. However, for those interested in the Derveni Papyrus, or other Orphic texts, this is an invaluable study.

Endnotes:

1. Richard Janko recently wrote a review of this book as well, and he comments on some of the finer points of the translation. Please see the *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2005.02.27 for that.
2. As Betegh says, "the basic question is how can the one (or the few) become many" (178).
3. The list of similarities or even influence on the author of the Papyrus does not stop there. Others include Anaxagoras, Diogenes of Apollonia, Democritus and Leucippus, Parmenides, Empedocles, and Philolaus.
4. Apparently raping one's own sister is not seen as a problem for the Papyrus author.
5. Compare this to Plato, *Timaeus* 68d, "For god only has the knowledge and also the power which are able to combine many things into one and again resolve the one into many."
6. Compare also the Stoic theory of the elements. Both fire and air are regarded as the "active" elements. When Zeno of Citium founded the school in about 300 BC, fire was believed to be the *logos* or divine principle. However, about 50 years later this was replaced with the belief that *pneuma*, which is a combination of fire and air, was the *logos*.
7. I found this chapter to be one of the most interesting in the book; Janko, however, in his review says that this chapter is the "weakest in the book."
8. Lucian, in *Hermotimus* 7, says that the fire burns away the "mortal" part of us, thus liberating our "divine" part. The bone plates from Olbia also have a zigzag pattern on them, which have alternately been interpreted as Zeus' lightning bolt, and also as snakes, representing immortality. One may also think of the death of Asklepios by lightening, which ultimately led to his deification. There are many other similarities between the cult of Asklepios and the practices of the Orphics.
9. Diagoras of Melos was executed in Athens for mocking and exposing the secrets of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Interestingly, Athenagoras of Athens wrote that Diagoras "made the orphic *logos* public, publicized the Eleusinian Mysteries and those of Cabiri" (Athenagoras, *Supplicatio pro Christianis*, 4)



One from Many... (continued from page two)

within the appropriate subsection of our community. I pray to Zeus that we never witness the day when the Hellenic Jihadist Society to Stamp Out Pernicious Heresy is formed, or members of the Threskian Inquisition creep upon unsuspecting Hellenists by the dark of night to make sure that they are performing their *spondai* and *thusia* in the right and accepted manner. Not only would such things be laughable to behold - *Nobody suspects the Spanish Inquisition - especially when they're not Spanish!* - but

they would be the gravest violation of our religious and cultural heritage which was founded on such precepts as Symacchus' statement, "What matters the path by which one seeks the truth? One road alone does not suffice to attain so great a Mystery!" and Caecillius' assertion, "Hence it is that throughout wide empires, provinces, and towns, we see each people having its own individual rites and worshipping its local Gods, the Eleusinians Ceres, the Phrygians the Great

One from Many... (continued from page ten)

Mother, the Epidaurians Aesculapius, the Chaldaeans Bel, the Syrians Astarte, the Taurians Diana, the Gauls Mercury, the Romans one and all - and this is as it should be, divinely appointed."

It is also completely unnecessary. Just as the natural landscape dominated the life of the ancient Greeks and shaped their national character, so there are two factors which have contributed to the make-up of the modern Hellenic Polytheist revival. Those are 1) our relatively small numbers and 2) the fact that at this time our presence is felt primarily through the internet. Because there are so few of us, we are not really in competition for space and resources, nor is there necessarily any reason why people of substantially different worldviews need congregate together. The internet allows us to create our own forums, websites, and organizations where people of similar temperament and philosophy may congregate in order to share fellowship with sympathetic souls, better formulate their theories, and pool their resources in order to accomplish goals specific to their aims. I think a lot of the past hostility and unproductive flame-wars resulted from a mistaken assumption that there was only one Hellenismos, and that all people who felt drawn to the Hellenic Gods and the culture which originally revered them must share a similar view on the important issues. When confronted with the reality of our diversity, people frequently became frustrated, saying, "You're not speaking for me when you claim X" or "I don't believe Y, how can you assert that this is part of our religion?" Originally there were only a very few online forums where Hellenists could gather, and so they were constantly subjected to different view points, and often felt the need to speak loudly and confrontationally in order to be heard. Familiarity, as they say, breeds contempt, and so what perhaps originally started out as minor differences grew into profound dichotomies and schisms. Irritation developed upon repeated exposure to alternative viewpoints, and people began to see these conflicts in terms of holy wars fought for the future and soul of our religion. They allied themselves with people who held similar views, and began to break away in order to form groups to better promote their respective ideologies, *Ai Mystai* on one end of the spectrum, *Elaiion* on the other, with *Neokoroi* and *Hellenion* possibly serving as the moderate, middle ground between them. And this, in the end, may be both the most consistent approach considering our cultural heritage and the numerous independent, politically and religiously diverse *poleis* which flourished in antiquity, and what ultimately saves our religion from being torn apart. That may seem an ironic statement considering the seemingly schismatic and fragmented approach that such a development represents, but let me explain this with a personal anecdotal digression.

I came to Hellenismos from a background in Wicca and other forms of Neopaganism. As I came to better understand the ethical and philosophical tenets of my religion, I found myself increasingly at odds with my previous religious background, and the communities to which I had belonged. However, when I came online there were only a few Hellenic e-mail lists and absolutely no representation in the chats on AOL. While I felt a deep kinship with my friends on the Hellenic mailing lists, they often weren't around to chat with through Instant Messaging and I longed for more immediate companionship. So, even though I

was the only Hellene, I spent a great deal of my time in the AOL Pagan chat-rooms. As a consequence of this, practically everyone that I spoke with was Neopagan, espoused some form of Wiccan ethics, and generally held to a duotheistic and archetypal vision of divinity - excluding the Ceremonial Magickians, Druids, Discordians, and atheists with whom I promptly became good friends. What was more annoying was that it wasn't enough that they believed this, but the assumption that many held was that *all* Pagans maintained similar ideas and practices, a notion I went to great pains to disabuse them of. However, fluffiness was rampant in the chats, where we were subjected to a shallow, commercialized, and watered-down interpretation of Wicca, annoying spell-begging, and the worst displays of ignorance and prejudice that one could imagine. I quickly developed a dislike for such people, and honed my debating skills through snarky discussions and the composition of numerous scathing rants which served to explode the many misconceptions that McWiccans had about the history of their religion, their sloppy ethical and metaphysical thinking, and the fact that Pagans were not Borg. The more that I was exposed to such individuals, the deeper my resentment and intolerance of them became, until I would summarily dismiss anyone who self-identified as a Wiccan, irrespective of their relative fluffiness. This intolerance on my part came to deeply trouble me, since I am not, by nature, a prejudiced individual, and so I began to examine my own motives and actions. I redirected my creative energy from tearing down the stupidity and misconception of others into building up my own religious community through writing educational essays, evocative poetry, and working on establishing an infrastructure and liturgy for the group that I had helped establish with my partner, *Thiasos Dionysos*. I also got a life - in the vernacular of the young people of today - moved in with my partner, got a full-time job, and had a child. Consequently, I no longer had as much time to spend in the chats and on general Pagan lists, and since I was no longer exposed to the irritant, no longer felt a need to establish my own territory and differentiate my views from theirs; I began to see them in a different light. It came to matter less what they did or believed, especially as it had no relation to my own personal beliefs and practices, and I could even come to appreciate the beauty and relevance of their approach *for them*. And most importantly, my time and energy was spent to a greater degree among kindred spirits who were working towards goals that I valued, so I felt productive and nourished by our common bonds.

And so now I heartily commend those within our own tradition who are doing likewise. Not only do I think this will help them find solace and a stronger sense of community, but I think that they will find such an approach to be overwhelmingly productive, as their energy is not being diffused by pointless debates that will never reach a climax, since we all have our own interpretation and way of doing things, and thus can be spent on more worthy efforts, such as building thriving local communities off the internet, the construction and production of public festivals, and an articulation of a more ethical, civic oriented religion on the one hand, and the revival of mysteries and the practice of magic on the other. In such a way, our community as a whole will be strengthened and prosper, under the ever-watchful eyes of the Immortal Gods.



Hekate

by Mike Rasschaert
<http://www.mike-rasschaert.tk>

The painting called Hekate is a remarkable one. Upon looking at it, the viewer is immediately caught and attracted by the look on the woman's face. The look is somewhat evasive, and scary at the same time. Not the kind of person you want to meet after dark. The way it was painted makes it surreal and suggestive, and clearly demonstrates that this is not a painting done in a classical sense like with Van Gogh or Rubens. The way it was done now is something fresh. The moon stands there to make a connection with the subject. Anyone who knows a little bit about Hekate knows that she is associated with the moon and here the moon serves as a link between the figure and the subject, to make the audience aware that this woman is not an ordinary woman. If you look at the painting in general, you see that it all fits into place, everything. The way it was painted, the colours used to create a certain atmosphere, the composition, it all makes sense. It all comes full circle in the end.