



# Η ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ

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*written and distributed by the Neokrotoi*

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## Table of Contents

### *Essays*

Incense Offerings.....	3
"I Begin to Sing of Poseidon".....	5
Not a People of the Book.....	6
Hestia - The Overlooked Olympian....	7
Dionysos - how he came into my life...8	
Hellenic Deities and Christian Saints..	13

### *Poetry & Hymns*

Hymn to Dionysos.....	4
My Gods.....	7
Zeus.....	10
Panania.....	12

### *Miscellaneous*

Song for Zagreus/Dionysos.....	9
Book Review.....	11
Eranoi Profiles.....	12



The Neokoroi\* are a group of Hellenic pagans who feel called to a path of service and devotion to the gods. We support mysticism, hard polytheism, and tend to favor Reconstructionism as an approach to developing Hellenismos, while also recognizing the importance of personal experience and local cultus. We are especially dedicated to fostering communities, festivals, and public shrines, and providing guidance and information on religious matters – all to ensure the strength and longevity of the worship of the Greek gods.

The Epistole (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.

The Epistole is a free publication and can be found in many locations nationwide. If you would like the newsletter delivered to you directly, subscriptions cost \$16 per year – contact us for more information. And please contact us if you would like to distribute copies in your area – in return you receive the issues in electronic format for free. Back issues can be downloaded in PDF form from the website for free.

To contact the editor, email: [info@neokoroi.org](mailto:info@neokoroi.org) – or visit the Neokoroi website: [www.neokoroi.org](http://www.neokoroi.org)  
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 March 2007. The deadline for submissions is February 20<sup>th</sup>. Advertising space is also available.

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\*The word *neokoros* is derived from the Greek words *naos* (temple) and *koreo* (to sweep) and originally meant “the one who swept the temple” or “the temple keeper”. It was a humble position, but an important one, for it was the neokoros’ responsibility to make sure that the temple was kept clean and free of any pollution, and also to tend to the daily service of the god in whose temple he or she served.

## Incense Offerings

by Sannion

Smell is perhaps our strongest sense and the one most keenly tied into memory. This afternoon I was shopping at the health food store when my partner handed me a canister of mulling spices to sniff. The citrus and cinnamon and other herbs instantly transported me back to my childhood when my mother would make cinnamon-scented ornaments for our Christmas tree, brew hot apple cider, and read to me from a scratch and sniff holiday book while I was nestled cozily in her lap. I hadn't remembered any of that for probably ten years now – and yet all of those associations were stored away in my brain, waiting for that scent to unlock the floodgates of memory.

The perfume industry spends millions each year marketing new fragrances to make us more alluring to each other or to make us feel more confident and daring, because they understand that like other animals, scents trigger chemical reactions in the brain which we are neither consciously aware of nor capable of controlling. It should come as no surprise then that scent plays a large part in religion.

Historian Walter Burkert writes, “Nothing lends a more unique and unmistakable character to an occasion than a distinctive fragrance; fire speaks not only to eye, ear and physical sensation, but also to the sense of smell. The sacred is experienced as an atmosphere of fragrance.” (*Greek Religion*, pg. 62)

The use of special scents to enhance the setting of a religious observance goes back to the earliest period in Greek history when choice woods and leaves were used to light the sacred fires for the “fragrant altars of the gods,” as Homer puts it (*Iliad* 8.48). Patroklos scatters something in the fire as an offering to the gods (*Iliad* 9.220) and Apollo orders the Cretan sailors he has chosen to serve as his priests at Delphoi to “build an altar there where the sea's surf breaks; upon it kindle a flame, offer white barley and pray while standing about it close by” (*Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 491). Sappho invokes Aphrodite to “come from Krete, down from heaven, come, for here your shrine in a charming grove of apple trees keeps its altars smoking with incense” (Fragment 2). Hesiod advocates, “Sacrifice to the deathless gods purely and cleanly, and burn rich meats also, and at other times propitiate them with libations and incense, both when you go to bed and when the holy light has come back, that they may be gracious to you in heart and spirit, and so you may buy another's holding and not another yours.” (*Works and Days* 338)

The two most popular kinds of incense for the ancient Greeks were *libanon* (frankincense) and *myrron* (myrrh). These came to Greece from southern Arabia via Phoenician traders and retained their original Semitic names. Both were especially connected with the goddess Aphrodite. According to Apollodorus (3.14.4) and Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 10.519-559), Myrrha was originally a young woman who incurred the wrath of the goddess and was punished with an insatiable lust for her father. Aided by her nurse, Myrrha deceived her father into sleeping with her and when he discovered what she had tricked him into doing, he pursued her with his sword and would have killed her had the

gods not heard the prayers of Myrrha and transformed her into the tree which bears her name. Her tears became the precious gum of the tree from which incense is made, and nine months later the myrrh tree split open and Adonis, who was to become the beloved of Aphrodite, was found within. Thus myrrh was burned in rites for the couple, as well as frankincense, the first attestation of which in Greek literature is to be found in the poem already quoted by Sappho.

While these two incenses were characteristic of the worship of Aphrodite, and may have come to the Greek mainland from her cult center in Cyprus, they soon passed into common usage in Greek cult everywhere. For as Burkert notes, “to strew a granule of frankincense in the flames is the most widespread, simplest, and also the cheapest act of offering.” (*Greek Religion*, pg. 62)

We also find frankincense being offered to Hermes, the Muses, and Apollo Musagetes in an inscription dating from 200 BCE at a school at Miletos (*Syll* 3 577) and the Greek Magical Papyri asserts that it is the proper incense for Helios (13.17-20).

The Orphic Hymns, which were composed probably in the early period of the Roman Empire and at Pergamon if the hypothesis of Otto Kern is correct, gives an extensive listing of deities for whom frankincense may be offered: Apollon, Ares, Artemis, Asklepios, Bakkhai, Dike, Eos, Hephaistos, Herakles, Hermes, Hygeia, Kouretes, Muses, Nike, Satyros, Silenos, Tethys, Themis and the Titans. In fact, the only deity that they specifically prohibit this incense for is Dionysos Kththonios.

Other incenses which the Orphic Hymns suggest are myrrh for Leto, Nereus and Poseidon, storax for Kthtonic Hermes, Dionysos, Eleusinian Demeter, the Erinyes, the Graces, Kronos, Semele and Zeus, and aromatic herbs for Adonis, Athene, Eros, the Eumenides, the Fates, Hera, Hestia, the Horai, the Nereids, the Nymphs, Okeanos and Rhea.

In addition to frankincense for Helios, *PGM* 13.17-20 also proposes storax for Kronos “because it is heavy and fragrant; of Zeus, malabethron; of Ares, kostos, of Aphrodite, Indian nard; of Hermes, cassia, of Selene, myrrh. These are secret incenses.”

And Plutarch (*On Isis and Osiris* 383d-e) gives the following recipe for kyphi, the traditional Egyptian temple incense which was popular in Rome and the Greek east: “Kyphi is a compound composed of sixteen ingredients: honey, wine, raisins, cyperus, resin, myrrh, aspalathus, seselis, mastich, bitumen, rush, sorrel, and in addition to these both the junipers, of which they call one the larger and one the smaller, cardamum, and calamus. These are compounded, not at random, but while the sacred writings are being read to the perfumers as they mix the ingredients.”

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This incense would be suitable for Dionysos and Demeter since he, like Herodotus, asserts that they are the same as the Osiris and Isis of the Egyptians.

Another scent which can be burned for Dionysos is pine, since the pine tree was sacred to him (Pausanias 2.27) as well as the myrtle (Scholium to Aristophanes' *Frogs* 330) and any bark or leaf since, as Plutarch said, Dionysos was worshipped everywhere as the god of trees. (*Symposium* 5.3.1)

The leaves of the laurel, however, belong especially to Apollo for whom they were burnt in antiquity (Kallimakhos, *Hymn to Apollo*) in commemoration of his beloved Daphne who gave her name to the bay tree. (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.452-567)

Barley-groats, in addition to being tossed on the altar as an *aparche* or first-fruits offering, can be burned in the fire, along with wheat and other grains, for Demeter since these were her gifts to mankind. (*Homeric Hymn to Demeter II*)

Flowers, especially the narcissus, the lotus, and roses can be burned or ground up into an incense for Aphrodite, since these

were said to spring up under her feet where she walked. (*Homeric Hymn V*)

There is an extensive literature on incenses and perfumes which may be used in the worship of our gods, but I have refrained from citing these since I have tried to stick with primary sources throughout this article. However, they can be invaluable resources, especially if you accept the Qabbalistic correspondences upon which they are usually based. The best volume to consult for this is Aleister Crowley's 777 which provides extensive listings of perfumes, herbs, plants, gems, colors, etc. for each of the gods. However, for the untrained student who is not familiar with the Qabbalah and the spheres of the Tree of Life, his tables can be difficult to wade through, so I would recommend the companion volumes *The Witches' God* and *The Witches' Goddess* by Janet and Stewart Farrar which have compiled that information in easily accessible encyclopedic entries under the names of the respective deities. Another volume, which has great information on how to make your own incenses and perfumes, as well as recipes for a number of the gods, is Scott Cunningham's *Complete Book of Incense, Oils & Brews*. Whatever faults the above authors may have in regards to other matters, when it comes to making things smell pretty, they know their stuff!

## Hymn to Dionysos

by Vajradeva

Lord of the Reeds,

Rider of the panther laden chariot.  
Maenads stride beside you

As you enter triumphant after the heat of battle.

How your golden locks sway in the wind!  
Pan intones a hymn in your honor.  
Your naked countenance  
Glistens from the sweat of strife.

Lord of the vine,  
For a millennia have they  
Found your divine phallus offensive.  
For how long has your  
Gospel of life and love been disgraced!

In this dark of dark ages  
You arise once again.  
To show us the way  
To a simpler time  
When life and death were as one.

To you my love and devotion forever.  
In India you are Shiva.  
In Egypt you are Osiris.  
In Rome you are Bacchus.  
In me you are King.

## “I begin to sing of Poseidon...”

by Laura M. LaVoie

Personal experience has always been the cornerstone of my spiritual practice. No matter how much research and reading I do, it always comes back to how the Gods have touched me in my life. For nearly two years I chronicled my personal experiences for PanGaia magazine. Published between Summer 2002 and Spring 2004, the “Goddess in America” series illustrated my experiences of finding Persephone in the glitter of Las Vegas and the Muses in the Smokey Mountains, among other topics. Although this was before I identified as Hellenic, it was no surprise to me that I continued to have similar experiences with Deity when I did begin exploring the path of Hellenismos. I recently reached out to Poseidon and he reached back.

It began when I became involved with a local Hellenic group in Atlanta. I enjoy creating ritual and I wanted to contribute by sharing my talents with the group. I volunteered to create the celebration for the libation to Poseidon in October, 2006. Experience often shows me my intentions aren’t always a clear path to the end. I knew very little about Poseidon and began to research his mythology to better understand him. With a month before the libation, I became immersed in his culture and stories. I created a shrine in his honor. On that shrine I placed a horseshoe, four small horses carved from stones, a seashell, a small bowl for libations and a single blue candle. All that was missing from this shrine was Poseidon himself.

My partner and I had already planned a trip to visit my aunt in Tarpon Springs, Florida. It is an adorable little town near the Gulf of Mexico that was settled almost entirely by Greek people. During this visit, I planned to find a statue of Poseidon for my shrine. Part of our trip was also planned around going out on my aunt’s 46-foot sailboat, if the weather cooperated. For the week prior to the trip, I prayed to Poseidon to allow us calm waters and enough wind to sail. All that week it stormed in Atlanta, so I wasn’t sure what the weather would bring in Florida.

When we arrived early on Saturday morning the first weekend of October, we were met with disappointment. We were told there wasn’t supposed to be enough wind to sail. Still, we decided that after an 8 hour drive from Atlanta, we were going out on that boat even if we had to motor around for several hours. So, after barely dropping off our suitcases, we were on the boat and heading out to the gulf. We talked, we joked. We shared a bottle of wine. Finally, we decided to unfurl the sails and see what happened. Next thing we knew, the sails were up and there were 15 knots of wind propelling us forward. We were sailing. I stole a moment alone to thank Poseidon for his grace that day.

That evening, Matt and I went into town to have a Greek dinner and to continue my quest to find a Poseidon statue to honor him on my shrine. The last time we were in Tarpon Springs I went home with a fabulous Apollo, so I was hoping for something great. In the very first shop we went into, Matt pointed at him on a top shelf. Dolphins surrounded Poseidon’s feet as he stood proudly grasping his trident.

When we got home I was recounting my experience with the other Hellenics in my community and told them how excited I was to create the upcoming libation to Poseidon. It was then that they reminded me; I had already committed to a Pagan festival in the north Georgia mountains and had forgotten about the conflict. However, I had already planned to offer a workshop so I was struck with inspiration. Rather than write a simple libation to Poseidon, we could use the opportunity to teach an Introduction to Hellenismos at the festival as well as hold the libation there for everyone to participate in. It was at that moment that I knew Poseidon has led me in that very direction. He wanted us to share his celebration with as many people as possible.

The weekend of the festival came quickly and we planned well for our workshop and ritual. As always, some things didn’t go quite according to plan. For instance, I completely spaced out when I went shopping for my camping food (I was staying over night...in a tent...without heat) and forgot to get grape juice. We planned to share the wine in a celebratory toast after the ritual, but didn’t want to exclude anyone who didn’t drink wine. We improvised by using the remaining water that we had brought for the khernips. Somehow this seemed appropriate in a ritual to Poseidon, as his blessed water would be a fine toast indeed.

Our workshop at the Starbridge “Turning Wheel” festival in the north Georgia mountains was held beside Lake Merlin. I, along with two members of the Hellenic community here in Atlanta, presented the material. When we began we had 5 people in attendance, but people wandered over throughout. We finished our presentation to a group of 12. And even after the workshop, people came by to experience the libation raising the number to 15 total. We explained to everyone what we were doing, what to expect and why we were doing it and proceeded with the ritual. A cleansing of each participant’s hands in the khernips began the ritual. We then offered libations of wine to the lake while Poseidon was honored by his epithets aloud. The Orphic and Homeric hymns to Poseidon were read. Finally, we offered an opportunity for each in attendance to come forward to the lake and pour a libation to Poseidon. They were invited to share aloud or remain silent as they chose. Considering no one there was specifically Hellenic in practice, I was elated when the first participant approached. She held in her hand the hymns that I had printed and shared for each to take with them and she said, “I have to say, this bears repeating,” and then she read from the Orphic Hymn:

“O spirit of the deep. Save the foundations of the earth and ships moving at full tilt, and bring peace, health, and blameless prosperity.”

And from that, nearly everyone there offered a prayer or thought to Poseidon. We were thrilled by the turn out and the participation. I was excited and pleased and knew that I had

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done something to make the Gods, and make Poseidon, very proud of me. After the program was completed we spoke to several of the participants and one man even told us that he felt very comfortable being a part of this ritual since it was simply an honoring of a god and nothing that would interfere with his daily spiritual practice. I think many pagans fear rituals because we do not know what to do or if we are doing it right. But the Gods

of ancient Greece only wish to be honored and for that we are blessed to do their work.

I thought my work with Poseidon was completed, but I often forget that the Gods have greater plans for us. When I was asked to write for the Neokoroi newsletter, I struggled to find inspiration until I realized that I needed to share this experience with the Hellenic community. It is an experience to remind us that our spiritual path is one of celebrating the Gods of Olympus, and in that we are each honored in return.



## **Not a People of the Book**

by Sarah Hekateia

*M*y religion doesn't have any holy scriptures; there's no one book (or even a collection) to tell you what the Gods want you to know, and there never has been. Sometimes I wonder if there will be someday, if the best of Homer and Hesiod and so on will one day be compiled into the Holy Book of the Hellenes, and whether even (Gods all forbid!) something I write may someday work its way in. I really hope we're smarter than that, but a few centuries down the line, who knows? Things certainly don't seem to have turned out for Jesus the way he would have expected.

The whole idea of a God writing a holy book to serve as scripture for all eternity seems kind of cheap to me. If it's meant to enforce consistency on people's modes of worship, it doesn't seem to be working very well for anyone. There's a lot of specific instruction in these books for how to deal with situations that were important thousands of years ago, and since the background conditions of society are different, people feel free to interpret those bits to mean whatever it suits them for them to mean. It's not a problem that can be solved by taking the texts "literally," either; in Australia in the year 3500, how would you literally interpret a religious text written in the US that said you should vote Republican?

I believe the Gods still interact with humans; if they didn't, what would be the point of religion? I'm willing to put my faith in their ability to communicate with people and make themselves known. To paraphrase the Christian Bible, "Do not be deceived;

the Gods cannot be mocked" - a passage which I think could be interpreted better than it has been. It's not saying that the God in question goes around smiting everyone who mocks him with mysteriously untimely deaths and/or thunderbolts from on high; that's obviously ridiculous. What it's saying is that if you're going to have faith in a god, you need to have faith that your God can stand up for herself; there's no need for you to fight her battles for her. There is no need for you to go out and attack those who have offended her, because she is perfectly capable of seeing what they've done and choosing to take action herself.

So there's no need for an official text to use as a "neutral" criterion for evaluating people's relationships with the Gods. Such things are between them and the Gods. If they only listen, they will learn all they need to know. If they don't listen, so much the worse for them. I see no danger of our being condemned to Tartarus for tying our khitons the wrong way, so I'm willing to let other people make their own mistakes after a point.

We're not a people of the book, we're a people of experience. If you want to know what it is to be a Hellenic polytheist, don't read a book - pour a libation. Make an offering, burn some incense, throw some barley, say a prayer. The Gods have not set down their final Word and left us to our own devices. They are still here, not only listening, but speaking. It is up to us to listen and to act.

## My Gods

by El-Sharra

Zeus Thunderer, father of Gods and man, king of earth and sky  
Dionusos of grapes and wine, born of Zeus' thigh  
Queen of Heaven, graceful Hera, goddess of womankind  
Wild Artemis of birth and moon and huntress of the hind  
Skillful Hephaistos, creative lord, lame god of forge and flames  
Hermes, messenger, swiftest god of merchants and thieves and games  
Grey eyed Athene of wisdom and war sprung forth from Zeus' mind  
Gentle Demeter of crops and field; loving, pure and kind  
Apollon of healing and sun, prophetic god of song  
Bloody Ares of battlefield's gore who rushes in headstrong  
Aphrodite of form and lust and the love that sets us free  
Poseidon lord of horse and quakes and ruler of the sea  
Pale Lord Hades king of death who took Kore as a wife  
Maiden Persephone, daughter of earth whose return brings forth new life  
Upon the alter Hestia sits enthroned within her flame  
The first and the last we offer her as we gather in their names

## Hestia - The Overlooked Olympian

by Anne Hatzakis

When most people think of the Deathless Ones of Olympus, they think of the more well-known deities such as Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Apollo and Athena as well as the others who sit on the golden thrones. Yet, even though Hestia is the eldest of the Olympian Goddesses (with the possible exception of the Foam-Born Aphrodite) she is rarely even mentioned, much less shown for the profound role she truly plays in our lives.

She is the far more than simply Mistress of the Hearth, content to sit in the ashes as if she was the "Cinderella" of the Gods, displaying no real personality of her own. Her role has always been central not just to the family home, but to the greater community. The hearth not only is where the every-day business of life such as cooking and meal-times occurs, but in ancient times was the source of heat and light during the nighttime hours. It was the light and warmth that lead it to be the center of family life instead of merely being an area of lesser importance. The domestic hearth served as both sacrificial alter and gathering-place around which the basic unit of community was formed.

As the Hearth-Goddess she is the guardian of both familial unity and the sacred duty of hospitality providing us with a deep and abiding sense of personal security. Robert Graves in his book *The*

*Greek Myths* even goes so far as to point out that the center of Greek life, even in the city of Sparta where the family was subordinate to the state, was the hearth-fire. When settlers went out to establish new colony cities, they would bring fire from the central hearth of their home city with them. Notable among the Olympians as the only one of the Great Gods who never engaged in war, she fosters a sense of community both in the Divine

realm and in the mortal lands. She acts in ways that not only preserves the peace, but actively fosters agreement in conflicting parties.

When (according to some scholars) she cedes her throne to Dionysus upon his ascent to the Halls of the Gods, it is with the knowledge that she would be a welcome visitor in any of the city-states of Hellas. She was granted the right of receiving the first and last offerings at any ritual or feast after refusing to choose between Poseidon and Apollo when both asked for her hand in marriage, preferring to maintain her virginity and her neutrality. This mirrors the importance that was placed on philoxenia, or hospitality, in the Hellenic culture. The traveler was given the place by the fire, the place closest to the Goddess' domain. But truly, her domain was, and still is, the entire home, the entire community, and the ties that bind us one to another.

Even to this day, she is remembered by the name of Vesta, who in ancient Rome was honored by virgin priestesses sworn to keep her sacred flame, thought of as the living spiritual strength of the city, alight. To tamper with the one of the Vestals brought with it a death sentence as this was seen as tampering with the bonds that made the community whole and strong.

The spirit of community she fosters is still evident in the modern incarnation of the Olympic Games. At them, "the youth of the world" gather for peaceful competition every four years bathed in the light of the central Flame, that is lit at the beginning and lasts to the end of the festival. What better example can there be for her enduring power?



## Dionysos: how he came into my life

by Mike Rasschaert

When I first came to this religion, Dionysos wasn't a deity that really spoke to me. After six years, he still didn't, that is until the last couple of months. At first, Dionysos seemed alien, foreign to me. A god that didn't fit me, at least not a type of god I wanted to pray to. At that time, he was the god of wine, ecstasy, madness and chaos. At least that was how he came to me. So it took me a while to start appreciating him.

It wasn't until last year that my vision on Dionysos started to change; although slowly, it did change. It happened after I started to delve into psychology, to find answers for my mental issues I was having, and still am having. I figured out that I'm suffering from social anxiety disorder, a disorder which is somewhat like being shy, but far worse. It makes you shut yourself off from any social contact out of fear of doing something wrong. Besides that, the symptoms are shyness, being afraid to speak in public, and being afraid to act in public in any way that might be embarrassing. People suffering from this usually have an enhanced awareness; meaning, they know what they are doing when they are doing it, which makes things only worse. As a result, I started to avoid certain places and situations where I would be the centre of attention. I hated speaking in public, in class during my school years. This usually was accompanied by feelings of self-loathing, low self-esteem. My overactive imagination didn't help there either as it had the tendency to feed my feelings of low self-esteem and self-loathing. Painting and drawing, being creative, did seem to work. It is safe to say that I didn't have much of a social life during high school, as I usually waited for others to approach me. I was able to make friends with some whom I'm still friends with. I did lose friends though over the years, a fact I regretted because I needed them to survive.

Around the time I converted to Hellenic polytheism, I was drawn to Apollon. Maybe not at first, but his influence was there and I felt it. I started to explore what was wrong with me. I wanted to know what was wrong with me, and where it went wrong so that I could avoid making the same mistake in the future. The maxim "Know Thyself" is something I held in high regard. I wanted to know what made me tick, how my mind worked. I needed to know that so that I could counteract it and become a better person. I recall having a discussion with Kyrene Ariadne about Dionysos and Apollon, where she said that Apollon is about knowing yourself and Dionysos is about being yourself. That couldn't be closer to the truth. If these gods teach us anything - and they do teach us - it is that Apollon teaches us to reach our potential, to be all you can be, but Dionysos teaches us that while it is okay to improve yourself, you shouldn't deny your very nature. You are who you are and make peace with it. Since last year I started to pray to Apollon to enlighten me, to lighten my path that I needed to walk on to self-improvement. While he did help me, it felt like I was missing something. I couldn't explain it and didn't think it could be Dionysos that was missing in my life.

The first step to learn about the gods is in books. That was very true for me. When I bought Richard Seaford's book on Dionysos from the Routledge series of heroes and deities from the ancient world, my view on Dionysos started to change dramatically. It was pointing me in the right direction, but it was when I read Walter Otto's *Dionysos* that my eyes really opened. I don't claim that Walter Otto's book is somewhat of a holy book or anything like that. What was different here was the author's style. It was completely different from that of Richard Seaford, which was also a joy to read. But where Richard Seaford failed and Walter Otto succeeded was to put Dionysos in a more positive light. Walter Otto's *Dionysos* felt like I was reading a book on Dionysos written by a Dionysian. And that is when it happened.

Dionysos was no longer just the god of ecstasy, wine and madness. He is the god of ecstasy, wine, madness, prophecy, terror, fears. God of ecstasy, because wine can be intoxicating and his presence can make a person ecstatic. He can make you lose all control and enjoy it. There are dangers to this, as the myths tell us. Dionysos can be very dangerous to deal with when angered. Pentheus made that mistake as did the pirates that captured him and anyone who defied him.

Although modern artists have portrayed him with feminine traits, he is as masculine as any other god. He's the one that can take away fears so that you are no longer afraid to confront a situation where you know you would be otherwise afraid. When angered, he can terrorize a person and drive them mad, the bad kind of madness which is lasting. Like most gods, he can bless you by making you be the person you are and take away your fears. But at the same time, he can make them worse and drive you at the edge of sanity, to the point where you become insane and you need to be locked up. The myths clearly back this claim up. In a frenzied state, Maenads can tear apart any living being, including their own children. Pentheus was killed by his own mother, who in a frenzied state did not recognize him. Apollon is just like that. Although they are two completely different deities and opposite one another, Apollon can cure people from sickness, but can make people sick as well. Unlike Apollon, Dionysos was killed twice and reborn again. First as Zagreus, who was torn apart by the Titans on command of Hera, who drove him insane, and then as the son of Zeus and Semele. Although a god, he understood the suffering and pain of mortals better than most gods, because he died and resurrected again. This actually corresponds with certain Middle Eastern theology of dying and resurrected deities like Tammuz/ Dumuzi, Osiris, Attis among others.

It clearly shows that Dionysos has touched my life and made me come to terms with myself more than before. Even though I'm a long way from being completely free of my inner demons, with the help of Dionysos and Apollon, I might be able to defeat them and become the person whom I am supposed to be, while staying true to who I am. I know I can't

(continued on page 9)



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do it on my own and I need them. Thanks to Sannion's readings and Dionysos who inspires them, I'm on the right path to become free of restraints, free of everything that plagues my mind.

With the help of the Gods, I might be successful in life, whereas I would have failed on my own.

To me, it was always clear that without them, I can't survive. My "mortal" friends help me to stay grounded and support me throughout my life, while my divine friends are the ones who watch over me and make sure I don't screw up. Anyhow, I'm definitely planning to spend more time with this deity. We will see where it leads me.



## **Song for Zagreus/Dionysos**

by Blue

*Author's Note: I wrote this performance piece for the Samhain 2006 ritual at Grove of the Other Gods (ADF), which was dedicated to Dionysos in his role as the god who dies and is reborn. This is a slightly modified version, more fitting to the Hellenic paradigm. For the section marked ALL PRAISE, we paused the performance for 90 seconds to allow ritual participants who were not playing the parts of the Fates time to worship in the manner of their choosing. However, this can allow for whatever you deem most appropriate.*

[The FATES approach the performance space, and pick up their props. CLOTHO has a skein of thread, LACHESIS a ruler, and ATROPOS a pair of scissors. In complete silence, CLOTHO unwinds thread from the skein, LACHESIS measures it, and ATROPOS cuts it. When the action is completed, the FATES lay down their tools and pick up masks, all of which are unadorned and identical, to be worn through the duration of the performance.]

CLOTHO:

Honey my words, O Polymnia,  
As I attempt to sing a story of Thrice-Born Dionysos,  
Beloved of Olympos.

LACHESIS:

Zeus, in the form of a serpent, lay with Persephone.  
And from the union of the God of Thunder and the Queen of the Dead  
Came Zagreus, the Bull-Horned.

In his paternal pride, Zeus, Lord of Olympos  
Placed the infant on his throne,  
Blessed fruit of divine passion.

Lady Hera saw and was enraged. No legitimate heir of hers was thus received!  
And so the goddess-queen conspired against the bull-horned interloper.

At her bidding the Titans gathered, intended assassins,  
To lure the child away from Zeus' throne.  
They tempted him with toys and called to him in sweetened tones.

Zagreus resisted fate until they offered him a mirror.  
The mirror, in which we are cleaved, creating what is seen from we who see,  
Caught the child's fancy, and he climbed down from his seat.  
And in that moment—

*(continued on page 10)*

*(continued from page 9)*

ATROPOS:

--That terrible moment, the Titans fell upon Zagreus, and rent his flesh.

[short pause]

Listen, you who claim reverence to the gods! Grieve for the pain of lost Zagreus!  
Proclaim the injustice of a sacred life, cut off so soon!

O you faithful, break open your hearts and speak your truth in the presence of the gods.  
Call to them in voices of praise and mourning.  
You bless their names, though you may curse their deeds!  
For piety is found in the veracity of emotion.  
Mortals, lift your voices to those whom you worship.

[ALL PRAISE]

CLOTHO:

We weep for Zagreus, but do not despair,  
For every journey begins with a tearful goodbye,  
And every flower blossoms from a seed torn apart.

LACHESIS:

Love and remember Athena, ever-resourceful.  
The grey-eyed goddess saved Zagreus' heart and placed his essence in Semele,  
Zeus' mortal lover.

Blessed are you, daughter of Cadmus!  
Princess of Thebes who gave her body and her life to save the sacred soul of Zagreus!

CLOTHO

For from the lost child is born Dionysos, Bringer of Ecstasy.  
Fair-faced redeemer who bestows the bounty of the vine,  
Freeing mortal man from the mundane.  
The Liberator, unbindable by humanity, our short-sighted greed or our restrictive rules,  
Frenzied Dancer who lures us singing from the cities,  
The Laughing God formed from unspeakable grief.

**Zeus**

by Corbin

Sky wand father mighty Zeus  
you who bring the rains in winter  
in summer you thunder and storm  
blow through the wind with all the lust  
of heaven in your bright lightning

all wise who works with eagles  
to measure the span of the worlds  
peers at the sea of mortal souls  
speaks prophesies in rustling groves  
knows the start and end of journeys

we who are packed in clay vessels  
but would be bronze as mirrors gleaming  
reflecting your Olympus  
call your name not with blood but thought  
raise our voices to your praises

look kindly on us kingly father  
rain but gently on the Earth  
hear our songs and prayers with pleasure  
you who hold the golden scales  
may we face our Fates with courage

live in wisdom live in honor  
so be worthy of our portions  
when the muddy clay is cracked  
rise like sparks in rushing fire  
to the light of your Olympus

## Book Review: *Graeco-Egyptian Magick: Everyday Empowerment*

by Sannion

It seems that the topic of Greco-Egyptian magic – or even the purely Greek variety for that matter – has been largely ignored in the pagan press. And considering the material put out on Celtic, Norse and “Druidic” magic, this is a boon for which we should give praise to the gods. However, for those looking for a deeper understanding of the magical systems of late antiquity which can only be gained from direct, experiential study and practice, this can prove rather frustrating. There is a wealth of scholarly work on the subject, some of it quite insightful – but you can only learn so much from the dry academics considering a creature they regard with suspicion and no small amount of enlightened contempt. With the exception of such valuable books as Stephen Edred Flowers’ *Hermetic Magic*, Don Webb’s *The Seven Faces of Darkness*, and David Godwin’s *Light in Extension*, the intrepid student of Greco-Egyptian magic has pretty much been left to their own resources in making sense of the collection of magical papyri that have come down to us from the second to the sixth centuries.

In some ways, that’s not such a bad thing. The composers of these spells and ritual texts were highly individualistic men and women who pieced together their own traditions from Greek, Egyptian, Semitic and Persian systems and would have approved of a similarly inventive, exploratory, and eclectic spirit in their modern-day equivalents. But on the other hand, those ancient magicians were part of living traditions and spent years studying in the temples or under the guidance of mentors before going out on their own and producing their uniquely syncretic systems.

Tony Mierzwicki has produced a volume which will help set the novice Greco-Egyptian magician on the right path with his *Graeco-Egyptian Magick: Everyday Empowerment*, recently published by Megalithica Books, an imprint of Immanion Press (ISBN 1-905713-03-7). Mierzwicki comes with pretty solid credentials. He has several degrees from the University of Sydney, is the author of previous magazine articles and anthology contributions on esoteric and paranormal topics, has been running workshops on magic and ritual construction in Australia and the U.S., and the introduction for this book was written by Donald Michael Kraig, a respected authority on Ceremonial Magick. So it should come as no surprise that this isn’t your average lightweight fluffy introduction to candle-burning rituals and contacting your power animals. Tony provides an exhaustively researched and cogently explained introduction to the planetary magic of late antiquity, drawing not just on the Magical Papyri themselves, but on kindred themes in the works of Cicero, Apuleius, Iamblichus, Gnosticism and the Hermetic corpus. He weaves all of these diverse strands together, showing the underlying unity behind them and producing a workable and highly powerful system for personal transformation and influence of the world around us.

Tony is an eloquent author, making this complex and at times confusing system easily understood and accessible to even the novice student. But one shouldn’t mistake that for a dumbing or watering down of the material; he is faithful to the original material, he explains the difficulty of working Greco-Egyptian magic and the pitfalls that await the unsuspecting or

undisciplined student, and the thing that impressed me most about this book: unlike many writers and practitioners of magic, he reminds the student numerous times that one is dealing with actual gods and spirits here, not just abstract concepts.

The portion of the book which I benefited from the most were the tables of correspondences which he collated from ancient sources, setting down the colors, incenses, images and other associations for the gods – all of which I intend to hijack for my own uses, even if I have no intention of following the particular brand of planetary magic which he sets forth.

And that is really my only criticism of the book – while the planetary magic he sets forth is clearly a valid, cohesive and effective system, and is drawn from the beliefs and practices of antiquity (as he so amply demonstrates), it’s not all that there is to Greco-Egyptian magic, a fact one unfamiliar with the PGM might not realize. The PGM are not a cohesive magical system in and of themselves; they represent an arbitrary collection of texts made by scholars in the early twentieth century originating in various localities over a period of roughly five centuries. They demonstrate a wide range of theological beliefs and differing approaches to magic, some quite profound. Many are so fragmentary that we cannot discern the context of how they were used or even what the individual wished to accomplish by them. The only unifying principle is the language in which they were composed, the Koine Greek of the Hellenistic east (along with some loan words from Hebrew, Aramaic, Persian, and Egyptian). However, many have conveniently ignored this fact and quote from the PGM as if it was a single text representing a uniform tradition, much the way people speak of “Gnostic teachings” or “Hermetic doctrine” as if the wildly differing schools that fell under these loose headings had no discernable differences. Of course, this is a small complaint, and one that is rather beside the point since Mr. Mierzwicki is doing nothing different than any of us do – the strictest Reconstructionist included – when we take large, complex and heterogeneous material and synthesize it down into a manageable system for our own personal use.

And one cannot disagree with the personal results that his system produces. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the book is his account of the ritual procedures and the personal testimonials he records from those who took part in them with him. All too often we’re presented with cookbook rituals that tell you to perform acts A, B and C, with minimal explanation of why and no confirmation of what you can expect to happen when you do. It is interesting to see the different reactions of his students and the very different experiences they describe after performing the same exact ritual together. I would share some examples, but Mr. Mierzwicki advises holding off on reading these testimonials until you have performed the rituals themselves, lest the descriptions unfavorably influence your own perception or your experiences, and that seems very sensible to me. Altogether I found this a wonderfully insightful book and I look forward to its upcoming companion volume.

## Panania

by Diotima

*T*was brilliant, above the shiny coves  
He danced and jimbled above the waves  
All whimsy were the singing nymphs  
And the raucous song, they gave

"Beware the Julbok, my pretty one!  
The arms that snatch, the hands that catch!  
Beware the thrum-thrum pipes, and shut  
The door and lock the hatch!"

He took his weapon in his hand  
Long time the winsome nymph he sought -  
and rested by the olive tree  
And pranced awhile (he's hot)

As, as in goatish mood he stood,  
The daring nymph, with hair of flame  
Came running through the tangled wood  
And echoed, as she came!

Left, right! Left, right! And two by two  
His hands went round her back!  
He embraced her charms with both his arms  
For he'd long since learned the knack!

"And hast thou lain the goat foot god?  
Sit down, ye, here, my charming sprite!  
Oh, blessed day! Sing nymphs, hooray!"  
(But beware, the noon-time light).

*T'was brilliant, above the shiny coves  
He danced and jimbled above the waves  
All whimsy were the singing nymphs  
And the raucous song, they gave*



## Eranoi Profiles

*I*n keeping with our mission to encourage "real life" worship, we support the formation of eranoi (local Hellenic pagan groups) and thiasoi (groups devoted to one god in particular). Below are profiles of the first two official Neokoroi eranoi:

### Name: **Eranos of Artemis Mounykhia**

Location: Cumming/Atlanta, GA

Founded: November 2006

Founding Members: Nicole Mazza, Ben Ranker, Laura LaVoie

Contact Email: [radiantbaby@mindspring.com](mailto:radiantbaby@mindspring.com)

Website: forthcoming

At the moment, we are doing simple libation rituals to the gods each month, but we are working towards doing more public rituals, some festivals (perhaps either monthly or quarterly depending on the scope of them), and a monthly ritual of Lectio Homerica (based on the Catholic ritual of Lectio Divinia where you read a spiritual text and meditate on it and analyze it with a group or alone - we plan to do this with the Homeric Hymns). We also plan on doing other things for the local community such as providing things like Hellenismos 101 classes (or classes/panels on other Hellenic subjects) for local pagan festivals or at other locations (i.e. New Age bookstores and such), Hellenic book study oriented discussion meet-ups as well as discussion of other Hellenic topics, etc.

### Name: **Eranos Agriotheios**

Location: Eugene, OR

Founded: November 2006

Founding Members: Sannion (Jeremiah Lewis), Oinokhoe (Kate Winter)

Contact Email: [oinokhoe@winterscapes.com](mailto:oinokhoe@winterscapes.com)

Website: [www.wildivine.org](http://www.wildivine.org)

Our practice reflects a combination of reconstruction and innovation - we believe in making tangible offerings to the gods, but doing so in ways that are also in tune with the time and place we live in. We also practice various forms of mysticism, and are interested in direct contact and communication with the gods and daimones. Our eranos is especially dedicated to Dionysos, Hermes, Apollon and the Nymphs. We have an extensive festival calendar and also perform smaller rites on certain days of the month, as well as give oracles, hold ecstatic rites, etc. We hold rituals at our home shrines as well as outdoors. We are looking for other people in the Willamette Valley area who are interested in the Hellenic gods and would like to join us for anything from discussion to ritual.

## Hellenic Deities and Christian Saints

by Gitana

I'm sure most of us are familiar with the theory that the early Christian Church "converted" the pagans in various locations by substituting a Christian saint for a local deity. They capitalized on the fact that these saints had very similar qualities as the local deities, or perhaps even altered the conception of the saint to match up with these deities. Numerous authors have explained how this happened with the Celtic deities, and it's also well-documented in the African Diaspora religions.<sup>1</sup> The very same thing seems to have also happened in Greece.

Lawson describes it thus: "The attempt to crush paganism had so far failed, and there was no longer any thought of a combat *à outrance* between the two religions. Violence was to give way to diplomacy; and the chief instrument of the Church's diplomacy was the worship of the saints. It became her hope to supplant paganism by substituting for the old gods Christian saints of similar names and functions; and the effects of the policy are everywhere in evidence in modern Greece."<sup>2</sup>

We know that near the close of the seventh century the word "Hellenic" was used to mean "pagan," and that "Hellene" meant one who was a "pagan."<sup>3</sup> We also know, from the Council of Carthage's 69th canon, written in 419, that in the fifth century celebrations honoring various Hellenic deities were held on the same days as those associated with Christian martyrs and saints.<sup>4</sup> This practice continued on into the 12<sup>th</sup> century, as "festivities, dances, games and other amusements were held on the memorial days of saints, not only in various regions of the country but also in cities."<sup>5</sup>

There were of course various methods by which this syncretization took place. One such way was for the Church to build a new basilica, chapel, or other religious building on the same spot that had been formerly dedicated to a particular deity, thus "fostering there a new cultus of her own in order to distract popular attention, and to supply Christian nourishment to the religious instincts of the people."<sup>6</sup> Such a method capitalized on the established tradition, an important thing for the Greeks who do not like to break with their past.<sup>7</sup> Theodoret of Cyrillus believed that another motive was to satisfy a psychological need felt by the people, which had previously been filled by the gods and heroes.<sup>8</sup> Thus we find that "[t]he cult of the heroes took on a Christian guise and survived in much the same forms, except that the martyrs and the saints succeeded the heroes."<sup>9</sup>

Let us now take a look at some of the individual deities and how they came to be associated with, or replaced by, Christian saints.

Zeus, as we know, was the King of the gods. He held the highest position among the deities of the Hellenic pantheon, and he rightly became associated with the Christian God. One attribute that both share is control of the rain. A few modern Greek sayings illuminate this well: "God is raining," and "God is throwing water." We find the same thing with the thunder: "God is shoeing his horse," "The hoofs of God's horse are ringing," and "God is rolling his wine-casks."<sup>10</sup> We might also compare the Homeric conception of Zeus to a line from a Cretan distich

about the Christian God: "He that gathereth the clouds and thundereth and raineth."<sup>11</sup>

Artemis was transformed into St. Artemidos, a male saint. The name of course is the first clue to the identification, but there is more. He is the patron saint of sickly children. In order to cure a child, their old clothes are left in the Church, and new ones that have been blessed by the priest are put on. This practice is almost identical to what was done in the sanctuary of Ephesian Artemis centuries earlier. To further cement the connection, such children are often said today to be "struck by the Nereids" who in mythology were the handmaidens of Artemis. She, and by association St. Artemidos, has power over them, and can lift their harmful actions.<sup>12</sup>

Another popular saint of the Christians is St. Michael. When we look at his role as a guide for the souls of the departed, and see in his image that he holds a sword, it is not a far cry from the figure of Hermes holding his wand. In fact, there is a painting, clearly of Hermes, that many years later someone had taken it upon themselves to add the name "Michael" to, as a title of sorts.<sup>13</sup> Some folk icons show St. Michael without a face because it is believed that he can only be seen just before one is about to die, or by the dead themselves.<sup>14</sup> He is also connected with travel, especially flight, and he is the patron of the air force and of all pilots. Celebrations are held in airports and on military air bases on his name day.<sup>15</sup> Also interesting to note is that the Christian feast of All Souls, "*Ton Psychon*," has practically the identical quality as the ancient *Anthesteria*. Both are days on which one's deceased ancestors and heroes are honored.<sup>16</sup>

St. Dionysius is obviously based on the notion of Dionysos. Lawson says of him, "The disguise of the ancient god is thin indeed. His name is changed by an iota, but his character not a jot."<sup>17</sup> Both are associated with Naxos, the vine, wine, and drunkenness. Even a street in Athens that runs beside the theater of Dionysos is now called Street of St. Dionysius.<sup>18</sup> There is a myth of St. Dionysius which Lawson includes in his book which is the perfect illustration of the complete way in which the saint assumed the character of the deity.

"Once upon a time S. Dionysius was on his way to Naxos: and as he went he espied a small plant which excited his wonder. He dug it up, and because the sun was hot sought wherewith to shelter it. As he looked about, he saw the bone of a bird's leg, and in this he put the plant to keep it safe. To his surprise the plant began to grow, and he sought again a larger covering for it. This time he found the leg-bone of a lion, and as he could not detach the plant from the bird's leg, he put both together in that of the lion. Yet again it grew and this time he found the leg-bone of an ass and put plant and all into that. And so he came to Naxos. And when he came to plant the vine— for the plant was in fact the first vine— he could not sever it from the bones that sheltered it, but planted them all together. Then the vine grew and bore grapes and men made wine and drank thereof. And first when they drank they sang like birds, and

when the crank more they grew strong as lions, and afterwards foolish as asses.”<sup>19</sup>

Poseidon is typically thought to have been replaced by St. Nicholas.<sup>20</sup> He is often called “the sailor.”<sup>21</sup> Even Clement of Alexandria remarks on the way sailors honor St. Nicholas.<sup>22</sup> It is also worthy of note that the Church of the Annunciation in Tenos was built over the old sanctuary of Poseidon. In ancient times many were healed in the springs, and today they continue to serve that purpose.<sup>23</sup> One of Poseidon’s epithets there was “healer.”<sup>24</sup> Along the Greek coastline and on the Ionian Islands many temples were re-dedicated to St. Nicholas.<sup>25</sup> In Albania the pre-Christian feast day falling on December 6<sup>th</sup> has been taken over by St. Nicholas. Consider this description of the fest day:

“[It] celebrated the return of the souls of the dead and was commemorated by the slaughtering and roasting of a sheep on a spit, *fërlík*. For this feast, the animal was kept in the house for weeks in advance. In Hoti, Gruda and Kastrati, the feast of Saint Nicholas lasted a whole week. It was custom in the north to light a candle and to leave the door open on the eve of Saint Nicholas to let the saint and the spirits of the dead into the house so that they might take part in the feast. The owner of the house would raise his glass of raki and say, “May the Night of Saint Nicholas help us!” Albanian “*Nata e Shënkollit na nihmoftë!*” In some areas, three candles were also lit to the mythological *juds* so that they would not do any harm. The longer the candle burnt, the greater the prosperity would be for the house in question.”<sup>26</sup>

Now Demeter is an interesting case, because she mostly seems to have transformed into St. Demetrius, patron saint of agriculture. He is very popular with the farmers, and his main festival is in October.<sup>27</sup> This is in keeping with Demeter’s sphere and timing of several of her festivals, from the Eleusinian Mysteries to the *Thesmophoria*. However, it is also exciting to observe that in Eleusis people refer to St. Demetra, who is a local and uncanonized “saint.” There used to be a statue of her, but it was taken in 1801 under Turkish authority, and now stands in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.<sup>28</sup> In Eleusis there now stands a church dedicated to St. Demetrius on the site of an ancient temple to Demeter.<sup>29</sup> On the feast day of St. Demetrius, October 26<sup>th</sup>, Albanians prepare their homes for winter by bringing out from storage all blankets, animal skins, and other items needed to stay warm in the winter. If the weather turns unseasonably warm, it’s referred to as “the summer of St. Demetrius.”<sup>30</sup> In Western Macedonia, grains and flatbread are sent to the church to be blessed on the feast day of St. Demetrius.<sup>31</sup> Thracians mark the eve of St. Demetrius’ day by having two men dress in a camel costume and parade about the village. They stop at each house to wish the family living there a happy new year, and the family gives them wheat and wine as a gift.<sup>32</sup>

The Virgin Mary has been much discussed by countless authors, and her image can be said to be based on many different figures, ranging from Isis to Persephone. “The cult of the Blessed Virgin arose in Western Europe in the High Middle Ages when a need became felt for a female counterpart, a goddess so to speak, to the traditionally male god of the Christian church.”<sup>33</sup> As far as her character goes, she is most closely related to Athena, also said to be *parthenos*, or virginal.<sup>34</sup> Athena was the patron of Athens just as the *Theotokos* (Virgin Mary) was the patron of Constantinople.<sup>35</sup> Compare what Solon wrote about Athena

protecting Athens to what was written of the Virgin Mary protecting Constantinople:

Our city everlasting shall stand;  
So Zeus and all the immortal gods command;  
Athena Pallas has her hands over it  
She of the mighty father, heavenly maid.<sup>36</sup>

To you, the Supreme Commander, does your city  
which has been saved offer thanksgiving for the  
victory. Since you possess invincible power,  
save me from all kinds of dangers so that I may  
cry out to you: Hail Bride Unwedded.<sup>37</sup>

Mary, being the most significant and most popular of the saints, has many festival days. The most important one, however, is the Feast of the Assumption, August 15.<sup>38</sup> (Orthodox Christians know it as the Feast of the Dormition.) It is imperative to remember that around this time is also when the ancients celebrated the *Panathenaia* which honored Athena. The faithful will mark the feast day by climbing up mountain peaks to honor her. Athena, of course, had her main temple, *The Parthenon*, at the highest point in Athens. Consider this description of such a Marian festival written by Pjetër Bogdani in the late 1600s:

“They spend all the night there, with drums, whistles, dancing and singing. After midnight they begin a mixed procession -- Moslems, Serbs and Greeks with lighted wax candles, their length proportionate to each person’s age. They walk round the peak of the highest mountain for three hours in bare feet (with some of the leading Moslems on horseback).”<sup>39</sup>

The Virgin Mary also has epithets we should take into account: *Panagia*, “All-saint”, and *Despina*, “maiden.”<sup>40</sup> Athena has corresponding epithets of *Panachaia*, “goddess of all the Achaeans,” and *Korie*, “maiden.”

St. Elias’ character is based on that of Helios, and this association has been noted numerous times in the past.<sup>41</sup> His chapels are to be found mostly on hilltops.<sup>42</sup> He also keeps the association with the chariot of his predecessor.<sup>43</sup> In the Bible he is carried into Heaven in a chariot of fire.<sup>44</sup> Some authors, however, not willing to admit the link between Helios and St. Elias, say that it is due to the events related in this Bible story that he became the “natural patron of high places,” and not due to an association with Helios.<sup>45</sup> We naturally beg to differ.

Aphrodite is more difficult to pin down. Some say she was replaced by St. Catherine, the saint of marriage and love.<sup>46</sup> Others say she transformed into St. Pelagia. It has been argued that through St. Pelagia “the Church continued, though admittedly under a very modified form, to pay homage to Aphrodite, to Venus, to the goddess of carnal pleasure and animal fecundity.”<sup>47</sup> Obviously Aphrodite was a figure that the Church might not really want to be represented by one of their saints. I share a quote from Usener on this subject:

“[O]ne and the same divinity reappears in the multiple variety of these legends like a trunk despoiled of its branches; thus the image that was profoundly impressed upon the soul of the people, though banished from its temples, continued to draw

from its secret roots sustenance for the new branches that were shooting out on every side... The Hellenism of the Imperial epoque contained but one conception which could have produced all these legendary forms: that of Aphrodite. It was necessary to tear from the hearts of the faithful the dangerous image which personified carnal beauty; it was accepted as it was, but purified in the fire of repentance and suffering in order to render it worthy of heaven.”<sup>48</sup>

Within Christianity Aphrodite, or at least the conception of her, takes on a new symbolism. As a religion of self-denial, which values chastity and penance, the subject of pleasure and sexuality is expressed often in unusual ways. It is unfitting of course for a woman, especially a female saint, to symbolize sexuality so she at the very least must be represented as a transgendered figure. There are numerous examples of bearded female saints being venerated in the Church: the Romans have St. Galla,<sup>49</sup> the Spanish St. Paula,<sup>50</sup> and in various other places in Europe this same model is expressed in the images of St. Liberata, also known as St. Wilgefortis, St. Kummernis, and other names.<sup>51</sup> This subject alone would make a most interesting study, but we can only touch on this briefly. Readers should remind themselves, however, that these transgendered saints are part of a tradition that has its roots certainly in the image of Aphrodite Amathus of Cyprus. She dressed as a woman, but had a man’s beard, and is generally thought to be Hermaphrodite.<sup>52</sup> Worship of this deity also involved transvestism; when people came to make sacrifices, the men would wear women’s clothing, and the women, men’s.<sup>53</sup>

“St. Charon,” also called Charos, who of course is not a canonized saint, is the one responsible for carrying people’s souls off to the realm of the dead.<sup>54</sup> In certain parts of Greece people still put a coin in the mouth of the deceased in order to pay him. It’s called *to peratiki* or “passage money.”<sup>55</sup> He is thought to be the saint of death, and according to Lawson, “[t]here is no ancient deity whose name is so frequently on the lips of the modern peasant as that of Charon.”<sup>56</sup> Nilsson clarifies what Charon represents to Greeks in the following way:

“The general Greek idea of the other world was of something else, the dark and gloomy Hades with its pale, dumb, powerless shadows. It was so ingrained in the Greek mind that, in spite of the fact that Christianity has preached quite a different conception for nearly two thousand years, the nether world of the Greek peasant is the same today. Its lord has kept the name of the ancient ferryman, Charon or Charos, although he is represented as a horseman and hunter.”<sup>57</sup>

We can also see in St. Therapon the ancient healing god Asklepios.<sup>58</sup> People regularly went to the temples of Asklepios to practice incubation, or sleeping in the temple in order to be healed, or to receive a message from the deity in a dream regarding what one needed to do to be healed. Constantelos comments that such incubation is “a tradition widely practiced even now in countries where Byzantine religiosity is alive.”<sup>59</sup>

There are a few other syncretizations that can be briefly mentioned: Haides and St. Donatus, mostly because of the similarity between the alternate name for Haides, Aidoneos;<sup>60</sup> Eilythua and St. Eleutherios, both reputed to help women in childbirth;<sup>61</sup> Prometheus and Adam, both made from clay; the hero Achilles and Saint Achilles, both connected to Larissa; Eris, goddess of strife and Satan, both of whom caused trouble with a piece of fruit, popularly believed to be an apple.<sup>62</sup>

Let us conclude our very brief look at the relation between the Hellenic deities and Christian saints with the following quote:

“Would it not appear as though the critics had established their case now that we have had to admit the existence among the Greeks of a cultus which in every detail recalls that paid to our saints, a cultus with relics, translations, inventions, apparitions and spurious or even forged relics. Can further parallels be needed to prove that the veneration of saints is merely a pagan survival?”<sup>63</sup>

\*\*\*endnotes found on back page\*\*\*

### Winter Scene

Zeus rains upon us, and from the sky comes down  
enormous winter. Rivers have turned to ice....

Dash down the winter. Throw a log on the fire  
and mix the flattering wine (do not water it  
too much) and bind on round our foreheads  
soft ceremonial wreaths of spun fleece.

We must not let our spirits give way to grief.  
By being sorry we get no further on,  
my Bukchis. Best of all defenses  
is to mix plenty of wine, and drink it.

- Alcaeus of Mytilene



- <sup>1</sup> In the case of the African religions, such as Vodou, Santería, etc. it seems to be the case that the practitioners themselves were responsible for this amalgamation in order to continue to practice their native religion under the guise of Christianity.
- <sup>2</sup> John Cuthbert Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion: A Study in Survivals*, Kessinger Publishing, pp. 42-43.
- <sup>3</sup> Demetrios Constantelos, "Byzantine and Ancient Greek Religiosity," in *Christian Hellenism: Essays and Studies in Continuity and Change*, Aristide D. Caratzas, Scarsdale, 1999, §1. (Article available online at [http://www.myriobiblos.gr/texts/english/Constantelos\\_3.html](http://www.myriobiblos.gr/texts/english/Constantelos_3.html))
- <sup>4</sup> Constantelos, §1.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, §1.
- <sup>6</sup> Père Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1961, p. 169.
- <sup>7</sup> Delehaye, pp. 171-172.
- <sup>8</sup> Constantelos, §2.
- <sup>9</sup> Martin Nilsson, *Greek Folk Religion*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1972, p. 21.
- <sup>10</sup> Lawson, p. 51.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- <sup>14</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael\\_\(archangel\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_(archangel))
- <sup>15</sup> <http://www.in2greece.com/english/saints/michael.htm>
- <sup>16</sup> Constantelos, §2.
- <sup>17</sup> Lawson, p. 43.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- <sup>20</sup> Delehaye, p. 191.
- <sup>21</sup> Lawson, p. 55.
- <sup>22</sup> The sailors of Aegina wish each other a good crossing in the formula, "May St. Nicholas be seated at thy helm". E. Curtius, *Die Volksgrüsse der Neugriechen*, in *Sitzungsberichte der k. Preussischen Akademie*, 1887, p. 154.
- <sup>23</sup> Lawson, p. 45.
- <sup>24</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Protrept.* § 30.
- <sup>25</sup> Robert Elsie, "The Christian Saints of Albania," *Balkanistica* 13, 2000, p. 41.
- <sup>26</sup> Elsie, p. 42.
- <sup>27</sup> Lawson, p. 44.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- <sup>29</sup> Delehaye, p. 172.
- <sup>30</sup> "October Holidays," <http://www.schooloftheseasons.com/octdays2.html> citing: Megas, *Greek Calendar Customs* and Spicer, *The Book of Festivals*
- <sup>31</sup> Elsie, p. 49.
- <sup>32</sup> "October Holidays"
- <sup>33</sup> Elsie, p. 38.
- <sup>34</sup> Lawson, p. 45.
- <sup>35</sup> Constantelos, §2.
- <sup>36</sup> Demosthenes, *On the Embassy*, 255, ed. C.A. Vince, Cambridge, 1963, p. 410.
- <sup>37</sup> C.A. Trypanis, *Medieval and Modern Greek Poetry*, Oxford, 1968, p. 9.
- <sup>38</sup> <http://www.in2greece.com/english/saints/virginmary.htm>
- <sup>39</sup> Elsie, p. 39.
- <sup>40</sup> <http://www.in2greece.com/english/saints/virginmary.htm>
- <sup>41</sup> C. Wachsmuth, *Das alte Griechenland im neuen*, Bonn, 1864, p. 23; Petit de Julleville, *Recherches sur l'emplacement et le vocable des églises chrétiennes en Grèce* in the *Archives des Missions scientifiques*, second series, vol. v., Paris, 1868, pp. 505-506.
- <sup>42</sup> Lawson, p. 44.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- <sup>44</sup> Delehaye, pp. 174-175.
- <sup>45</sup> F. Lenormant, *Monographie de la voie sacrée Éleusinienne*, Paris, 1864, p. 452.
- <sup>46</sup> Lawson, p. 120.
- <sup>47</sup> Delehaye, p. 197.
- <sup>48</sup> Usener, *Legenden der heiligen Pelagia*, p. 20.
- <sup>49</sup> *Acta SS.*, Oct., vol. iii., pp. 147-63.
- <sup>50</sup> *Acta SS.*, Feb., vol. iii., p. 174.
- <sup>51</sup> *Acta SS.*, July, vol. v., pp. 50-70.
- <sup>52</sup> Delehaye, pp. 205-206.
- <sup>53</sup> Usener, p. xxiii.
- <sup>54</sup> Lawson, p. 53.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108-109.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- <sup>57</sup> Nilsson, pp. 116-117.
- <sup>58</sup> Lawson, p. 56.
- <sup>59</sup> Constantelos, §2.
- <sup>60</sup> Delehaye, p. 175.
- <sup>61</sup> Lawson, p. 56.
- <sup>62</sup> Stergoula Papageorgiou, "Greek Gods in the Past and Today," *Καθημερινή Καθημερι* 1, 2006, <http://languages.arts.unsw.edu.au/greek/mirror/>
- <sup>63</sup> Delehaye, p. 165.