



Η ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ

a quarterly newsletter for Hellenic polytheists
written and distributed by the Neokoroi

Issue Number 12

Εαρ (Spring) 2007

Table of Contents

Essays

A Theoxenia for the Nymphs.....	3
My Life with Artemis.....	4
Hera: The Power Behind Change	7
Kyklos Apollon Ritual.....	9
Ares & Hestia: Partners in Social Activism.....	12
Old Texts, New Contexts.....	13

Poetry & Hymns

Hymn to Hermes Enodios.....	5
Anthesteria.....	7
To Aphrodite.....	8
Dionysus.....	16

Miscellaneous

Our New Exegete.....	3
The Library of the Ancients.....	5



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
or visit the Neokoroi website: 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 June 2007. The deadline for submissions is May 20th. Advertising space is also available.

© 2007 *All submissions published by arrangement with the author(s). All rights reserved. Neokoroi reserves the right to edit submissions for space and content as deemed appropriate. All materials published are protected by international copyright law, and any unauthorized reproduction is prohibited.*

*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.

A Theoxenia for the Nymphs

by Oinokhoe

Worship of the nymphs, while important and ubiquitous in ancient Greece, has not come down to us in detail. We know where the nymphs are likely to be found (caves, springs, trees, mountains, meadows, gardens, fountains), we know some of the most common votive offerings (knucklebones, reliefs, dolls, jewelry, pottery, coins, lamps, seashells, flowers) and libations (honey, water, milk, oil, sometimes wine). But we don't know much about the rituals themselves, and we have no complete record of a festival for the nymphs.

A couple years ago, I decided to create a few modern festivals for the nymphs. I placed them on the 27th of four lunar months, after a calendar from the deme Erchia which listed a sacrifice to the nymphs on that day. Each festival focuses on one kind of nymph, the ones I feel most connected to – limnades (marshes and lakes), dryads (trees), oreades (mountains) and naiads (springs, rivers). Of course an important part of these festivals would be going to seek out the nymphs in each of these particular areas. But what then? Aside from leaving offerings, what else could be done on a festival for the nymphs?

One of my favorite traditions from antiquity is called a *theoxenia* – a feast held in honor of a god or gods, to which the deity is invited and served as a special guest. A theoxenia is treated essentially as a divine dinner party. A formal invitation is made for the god. Tables are set opulently, food and drink served, music played. Sometimes there is an object, such as a small statue, at one seat to represent the god. The god's plate is heaped high with good food, his/her cup filled with wine, and the god's presence is felt throughout the meal.

Adapting a theoxenia festival for the nymphs would not be breaking new ground. We know that there was one held for Dionysos and the nymphs at Mytilene, called the Theodaisia. And banquets in general were considered appropriate offerings for them. But I suggest that a particularly appropriate format for a nymph theoxenia would be as an outdoor picnic.

The first step is to find a nymph-haunted place in your area. This might be an especially beautiful spot, or one where you feel inspired. It might be a prominent natural feature, such as the largest river or mountain nearby. If hosting a theoxenia for a particular type of nymph, you would need to search out their specific home – for instance, a marshy place for the limnades. Before the meal (or even a couple days before) it might be a

good idea to clean up the area if there is litter – not only is this a good gesture towards the nymphs of the place, but beautifying natural areas was actually a form of devotional activity for the nymphs in ancient times too.

I like to make physical invitations for the gods or nymphs for my theoxenia. Handmade cards are good for this. Afterwards, they can be burnt as offerings, left on an indoor personal shrine, or saved with other mementos. A beautiful space can be created for the meal, using a nice picnic blanket, actual plates and cups (rather than paper or plastic), flowers, and other decorations. A full place setting should be laid out for the nymphs, including silverware, napkin, etc., and obviously also a full portion of the food and drink that is served. The menu is up to you, though I would suggest including something they might particularly like, such as honeybuns or strawberry shortcake. Pure spring water would make both a good drink and good libation liquid. (While some people say the nymphs do not accept wine libations, the ancient sources I've read indicate that this was only true in some areas, and I would suggest asking your local nymphs directly. I've found that many like a nice, dry white wine, and mead is especially nice if you can find it, since it is made from honey, one of their special foods.)

I would begin the festival with a libation and the reading of a hymn or prayer; my favorite is the Orphic Hymn to the Nymphs, which mentions several different types. Reading the invitation out loud would be a nice gesture as well. I would also suggest that during the meal, irrelevant conversation be kept to a minimum, and the guests should be aware of the presence of the nymphs around them, and act accordingly. Poetry could be read, songs sung, instruments played. Music and dance are especially pleasing to the nymphs. When everyone is ready to go home, a final libation should be poured, and the nymphs should be thanked for being your guests. Make sure not to leave any litter behind; the spot should look just as good or better than when you came. Finally, coming back to the same place repeatedly for future nymph picnics would be a good way to establish *kharis* with the local nymphs.

For more information on theoxenia in ancient Greece, I recommend the article "Theoxenia" by Michael. H. Jameson in *Ancient Greek Cult Practice Form the Epigraphical Evidence*.

OUR NEW EXEGETE

Name: Sannion, Exegete of Dionysos / Location: Eugene, OR / Email address: sannion@gmail.com
Websites: Sannion's Sanctuary – www.winterscapes.com/sannion and Wildivine – www.wildivine.org

"For many years now I've been serving my god in this capacity already, answering obscure questions about cult practice, offering spiritual guidance, and performing oracular work on his behalf. I believe that I can bring my years of experience, my knowledge and dedication to serve my god within the Neokoroi organization."

My Life with Artemis

by Nicole Mazza

*I*t's almost difficult to remember how I started on this path – a path holding the hand of Artemis.

I can remember two things distinctly that seem to point to my first steps on the path. First was when a friend of mine's father had a story that he was almost named Artemis. I am not sure why at the time, but I remember the name resonated with me even then at about 13 years old (to the extent that I can still remember that conversation pretty vividly to this day). Secondly, I often would sit in front of my window at night and pray to the Moon starting around the same age. When I found out more information on Artemis in my early teens, I changed from generically praying to the Moon to specifically praying to Artemis herself. That was the beginning of my relationship with Her.

I have always been interested in the religions of the world, even as a teenager. Even though I always held Artemis close to my heart, I went on to try on many religions. I began as Catholic from birth, but moved from there to a pretty eclectic worldview, on to Buddhist for many years, and then on to Stregheria.

For Stregheria in particular, I had figured my link to Artemis might mesh with the very Diana-focused tradition (while I am not much of a syncretist, I figured it was worth a shot). Unfortunately, I somewhat quickly began to feel it was not a good fit for me as something with it just didn't "feel right" once I delved deeply into the religion. Still, it was a very distinct example of a period of my life where I was trying to fit Artemis into a spiritual path for myself. This tinkering often led me into situations where it seemed as if I was trying to fit square blocks into circular holes.

Tides turned when my boyfriend Ben came into my life. Being a Hellenic Polytheist himself, he introduced me to modern Hellenic Paganism. At the time, I had never met anyone of that religious disposition in the local pagan scene (just mostly people who were Wiccan and/or Celtic-oriented) and didn't even know that such a spiritual path existed in modern times. At the time, I was still calling myself Strega (a follower of Stregheria), but, as I said, it was an ill-fit for me. Hellenic Polytheism made perfect sense to me to look into, as Artemis is already a part of that pantheon (no square blocks in circular holes here!), but I still had a few reservations. I have a bit of a rebellious, individualistic streak in me, so I was worried that people would think that I became Hellenic because my new boyfriend was. So, for several months, I stubbornly pushed it to the side and surprisingly went on seeking a different path to fit Artemis in.

Sometimes the Gods just need to knock you over the head to get you going on the right path. As an often stubborn person myself, this is very true for me in this situation. It was around this time when I started to get nudged more towards the Greek pantheon despite my protestations. It was like all of these coincidences were pushing me towards Them, things that were becoming increasingly difficult to deny.

It all culminated in April of 2005 when Ben and I traveled up to Boston to take part in our first Hellenic ritual with a Hellenion Demos (essentially a Hellenic church group) that used to be active up there. With himself being the only Hellenic Polytheist that he knew in the Atlanta area (I was still in a bit of denial), it was important to him to participate in a Hellenic ritual with others on the same path. Out of curiosity, I thought I would join him on his quest, especially since, ironically enough, it was a ritual celebrating the ancient Artemis-focused festival of Mounykhia.

I had no idea what I was getting into, but I think that Artemis certainly had plans for me at that ritual. During a solitary moment in her temple at Cataleos (where the ritual was held), I had an experience with Her. One by one, each participant had gone into the temple room alone to make our offerings of moon-colored cakes and libations of wine to Artemis. I remember that I was so nervous by myself in the temple space as I wasn't entirely sure what to do. I found myself muttering aloud that I was really nervous about what I was doing, that I was afraid of inadvertently doing anything offensive or wrong, etc. As I offered my cake on the altar, I could hear a voice state firmly in my head, "Stand tall, child! Stand tall before me." It was Artemis talking to me. It was odd not only because I had actually heard a voice, but because I knew it wasn't an angry voice. It was just like She was saying firmly, "Put away your fears and stand before me," as well as also acknowledging the strength that was actually in me, that I often hide from myself. At least that was how it felt. So I stood before Her statue, proud and tall, crying a bit, until I stopped so that I could let the next person in.

That moment had a profound effect on me. A seed had been planted and it seemed almost as if the floodgates opened. I started getting these strong feelings, these epiphanies, that felt like they were coming from Artemis and they were pushing me to do certain things. The biggest thing that she pushed me to do was to help "gather her children."

At the time, there seemed to be very few Hellenic Polytheists down in the South and the ones that were most active in the community were so spread out that we were all working separately. She wanted me to try and bring everyone in the surrounding area together despite this, first for discussion and then, hopefully, for ritual. This was how the Southeastern Hellenes list and group were born.

Since that time, things have come together nicely both in the local Atlanta area where I live as well as in the Southeast itself for Hellenic activity. I can't help but feel this has all been guided by both Artemis and the other gods. That is why when I finally was able to create a local eranos and proto-demos, I named it in honor of Artemis Mounykhia, who has inspired it all.

It's almost difficult to remember how I started on this path – a path holding the hand of Artemis. Despite all this, I am so honored to have Her by my side after all of these years.

Hymn to Hermes Enodios

by Gavin Renee Porter

*H*ermes Enodios

The roads are yours
The highways stretching to the distant horizon
The hidden pathways through forest and meadow
The dark dusty trail leading nowhere and everywhere
Restless wanderer, your journey is endless
Every sight you have seen
Every path you have walked
Yet never satisfied, you hunger for more
More sights to see, more paths to walk, new territory to explore
It is your name men call when, straying from the safety of home
To dark, unfamiliar worlds
To you do they call for safe passage, for protection and guidance
For only you can call back the shadows and keep danger at bay
To you as well belong the children of the roads
Those men who do not know Hestia's comforting touch
Those who live beyond the village, mortal dwellers of the liminal realm
These outcasts are your special children and you guard them well
Show them how to think on their feet, live by their wits
To survive in a free but harsh world
Hermes Enodios
Welcome everywhere yet belonging nowhere
I offer my praise to you.

A lone traveler you are,
Rarely is one welcome to walk alongside you
So it is my great honor to see your hand open to me
The inviting smile on your laughing lips
And so I will accompany you, Hermes
Walking along in your winged footsteps
The sights I will see, the knowledge I will gain
Well worth the sacrifice of home, family, stability
The path is hard and not for all
But I will persevere
I will be a wanderer of life's many pathways
With my immortal guide forever beside me
Pointing out the way ahead.



The Library of the Ancients, Part One

by Sannion

*I*t's pretty common-sense that if you want to learn about ancient Greek religion the best place to start is with the ancients themselves. But the question naturally arises, however, where should one begin with the ancients? Although the amount of ancient Greek literature which has come down to us represents only a tiny fraction of the total output we know was produced during the almost ten centuries that separates Homer from Nonnos, that is still a huge pile of texts to wade through. To help

the intrepid student of ancient Greek literature I have agreed to write a regular column for *He Epistole* highlighting some of the more important authors of our tradition. I will try to place them within their proper historical context, emphasizing the more important aspects of their work, how it fit within the tapestry of Greek thought, and what value may be gleaned from their words by modern readers. Of course, because I will be writing for a publication that is generally twelve to sixteen

(continued from page 5)

pages long, these will have to be mere reviews and not in-depth studies of the authors and their works, as they more properly deserve. But hopefully that will be enough to inspire you to search them out and read them on your own, and thus be in a better position to draw your own conclusions about their worth.

For our inaugural trip into the Library of the Ancients, I have chosen three authors who date from a comparatively late period in antiquity (a time which in many ways resembles our own modern world) and whose works have a special interest for all of us who are concerned with the revival of Hellenismos.

Pausanias, *Periegesis Hellados* “Description of Greece”

Pausanias’ travelogue, covering southern and central Greece, is perhaps one of the most valuable books to have come down to us, for the author was keenly interested in antique cults, temples, oracle centers and mysteries, which he records with loving detail. If it wasn’t for his work, many of these things would have vanished without a trace, especially since in his time they had already begun to decline.

Pausanias lived during the second century of our era, when Greece had been a Roman province for almost three hundred years. The Imperium had brought relative peace and wealth to the world, along with just administration and easily travelable roads, many of which are still in use today. Leading up to annexation by Rome, Greece had suffered through centuries of brutal warfare, civil unrest, famines, and political upheaval as the Successors of Alexander battled each other to claim control of his crumbling empire. Plutarch, who had lived approximately in the generation before Pausanias, relates that Greece was so depopulated from all the wars, famines, and natural disasters that “today the whole of Greece would hardly muster three thousand men-at-arms, the number that the Megarians sent forth to Plataea.” (*On the Obsolescence of Oracles* 414a)

So it is no wonder that Greeks embraced the *Pax Romana*, even if it meant a loss of autonomy and little room for them in political affairs beyond the local sphere. What Rome did provide them with was material comforts, wealth and leisure, which many, like Pausanias, used to take in the fading sites of a once glorious past. His book is written for just this audience, and he sets forth all the things worth seeing in each of the cities he visited, recounting their history (both political and cultural) as well as the myths and other sacred stories attached to the places, what the places looked like, and the easiest way to get to them. His mythological digressions are fascinating, especially when he preserves a variant account of a famous story otherwise unknown, shares bits of gossip, or preserves fragments of a poet whose work would have been completely lost were it not for him. Pausanias also gives firsthand accounts of the cult procedures and sometimes offers tantalizing glimpses at the mysteries celebrated there, though in regards to the latter he is usually fairly tight-lipped, as when he stops short of describing the Eleusinion at Athens because of a dream sent him by Demeter. (1.14.1-3) Because of the accurateness of his descriptions, archaeologists have managed to find important sites simply by following what Pausanias wrote. Although it can be rather tedious reading, and never provides a profound

exploration of the theological matters it touches upon, the importance of the *Periegesis* cannot be overestimated.

Aelius Aristides, “Orations”

Publius Aelius Aristides was a Greek rhetorician who lived in the same century as Pausanias. He came from Bithynia (birthplace of the prophet Alexander and the divinized Antinous) and studied under the most famous orators of his time at Athens, which had become the intellectual capital of the Empire. He traveled widely through Asia, Egypt, Greece, and Italy and had a promising career in the law courts ahead of him until he took ill.

However, this is where things get interesting, for Aristides went to the sanctuary of Asklepios at Pergamon where he was healed after receiving a vision of the god. Thus began a lifelong devotion to the god which Aristides chronicled through his many speeches and prose pieces, especially the *Sacred Orations* which chronicle the many illnesses he suffered and the various cures and regimens prescribed for him by the god. Aristides demonstrates in the clearest of terms what we moderns describe as a patron relationship, for his devotion to Asklepios is almost singular in nature, and extends to all aspects of his life, from important career decisions to whether he should bathe that day. One would be hard-pressed to find a more detailed account of personal religion and the place of a god in an individual’s life in all of ancient literature.

At times this can be a bit much, however, as one reads through endless pages of recounted dreams, visitations, and assorted divine communications about the most trivial of matters. While there is something to be said for living closely with the gods, a line must eventually be drawn. I think that line is probably at vomiting and enemas, something that Asklepios allegedly advises Aristides to perform with disturbing regularity. Asklepios would also seem to have had something against Aristides bathing, and the rhetorician will go weeks, and sometimes months, without doing so because of divine commandments. Considering antiquity’s lack of deodorant you can imagine how ripe he must have gotten after awhile! But, just when you begin to suspect that our author is a neurotic and borderline schizophrenic he will break out in beautiful, rapturous praise of the god he so clearly loves, words whose sublimity and power resonates strongly with the reader. In addition to Asklepios, Aristides also wrote prose hymns for Apollon, Zeus, Athene, Dionysos, Serapis, the Nile and other gods – often at the bidding of Asklepios – and it is interesting to see how these gods figured in his life, and the concrete actions they took on his behalf. His works are peppered with fascinating tidbits of cult practice and history, and he was a voracious reader who quoted amply from the many authors who came before him. He consciously – perhaps too consciously at times - strives to promote himself as an heir of the great Sophists of the past, and as a result of this is highly critical of Plato, the arch-nemesis of Athenian sophistry. Considering how strongly Plato influenced the intellectuals of Aristides’ time – an impact that has lasted down to our own – Aristides’ dissenting voice deserves to be heard, if only to offer another view.

(continued on page 7)

(continued from page 6)

Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistai* “Dinner of the Sages”

Athenaeus was born in Naukratis, the earliest Greek settlement in Egypt, studied in Alexandria, and eventually moved to Rome where he wrote his strange volume, the *Deipnosophistai*, a huge compendium of knowledge in the guise of a conversation between a number of wise men at a dinner party. While the genre of banquet conversations goes back to Plato, and through him Xenophon, Plutarch, Cicero and Petronius (who satirized the genre) – Athenaeus’ work is something else entirely.

His dinner-guests expound on every conceivable topic under the sun, from the different sizes and types of drinking vessels to the most hotly contested philosophical issues of his day. Their favorite digressions are politics, religion and history, though somehow it always comes back to food and drink. Following the trains of thought can be quite bewildering, especially since they have a special fondness for the obscure and trifling, and will

spend whole pages deconstructing verb forms and what type of cup Herakles used in his drinking contest with Dionysos – but it can be great fun as well, and you’ll certainly learn a lot from these aptly labeled wise men. Perhaps the best part of Athenaeus is also the most baffling. Somehow all of his dinner guests have perfect photographic memories and can recall whole poems by obscure authors nobody (including the other guests!) have even heard of, in their entirety no less. As a result of this, hundreds of poets and prose writers who would have been completely lost to history are preserved.

If you want to know anything about ancient Greek religion, mythology, history, or dining customs, chances are you’re going to find it in some random anecdote of Athenaeus’ party guests. We modern reconstructionists have a reputation for being pedantic know-it-all who split hairs over the most pointless things. After reading Athenaeus you’ll come away realizing we have a long way to go before we can claim the title of the geekiest Greeks.

Anthesteria

by Todd Jackson

*T*he hour before the circle gathers at the Sun God's feet,
and the steam is separated from the dust,
Now,
Io Bakkhae,
Lift me up, Dionysos, sink me down.
Set my soul to dancing with the dead.
Every step upon the desert crust,
And the dead rise up as dust.
My friends thirst!
A splash of the wine to the desert dust.

Hera: The Power Behind Change

by Miguel

*W*ho is Hera? The jealous wife who punishes Zeus’ lovers and their offspring because she can’t punish Zeus Himself? That is indeed the image most of us in our modern society tend to have of this Goddess – but countless evidence points to another Goddess, a Great Goddess, worshiped throughout Greece as an equal to Zeus and a widely loved Deity, not a hated, feared one.

What is the one thing behind this Goddess that could possibly light the shadow that corrupts our image of Her? Is she really just a nasty Olympic wife? I don’t think so, nor do most Hellenes. For me, Hera is the Goddess of change, of growth and maturity and therefore of obstacles.

Her sons and daughters all operate as changing agents: Ares is war, which always represents a brutal change for the people and nations involved in it; Hephaestus transforms the ugliest stone to the most perfect gem; Eileithyia brings babies who are always a

huge revolution in one’s life; even Hebe, youth, is but a mere transition for mortal beings.

The Goddess is also escorted by a group of Deities whose domain includes change: the Horai, the seasons, the natural cycle and the modifications of Nature throughout the year; the Moirai, the Fates who impose the most drastic of changes, death; the Kharites, who give beauty but also the Ones who take fairness away just as easily.

Hera is also called Mother Earth in some Greek literature, and in the Orphic Hymn She is referred to as a Goddess who endlessly cares for humankind and who inspires life and from whom all things are produced. There is also evidence that She was worshiped as a Mother Goddess and it was Her people would call for help when they couldn’t get pregnant (which is partly explained by Her daughter, Eileithyia). How can we

(continued on page 8)

(continued from page 7)

understand all this if Hera Herself is not of a nurturing nature as described in the traditional Homeric image?

We can understand it by referring to the myth of Her wedding with Zeus. In that occasion Gaea offered the Goddess golden apples and, delighted with their beauty, Hera planted the seeds and made them grow. It is interesting to note that She did not create the apples, did not feed them or protect them, she “merely” planted them and made them grow. That is, I believe, the secret of Hera’s power: the force that bestows life, that makes living beings strive for accomplishment, but does not help them beyond giving the initial impulse and the following “pushes”. Hera is the sparkle of life.

But Her domain does not stop at the moment of creation, rather it expands to include both physical and psychological growth. Throughout our life the Goddess creates obstacles that teach us something: new skills, new emotions, new knowledge... She challenges us to grow and even if we can’t overcome Her obstacles we still learn how not to do things or how to deal with defeat. Proof of this are the countless myths of “vengeance” upon Her husband’s lovers and their offspring.

Hercules is the most striking example of this. His name means “glory of Hera” and yet Hera is portrayed as someone who kept making his life harder: She plotted the twelve labours, She drove him mad and made him kill his family, She openly argued with Zeus about him... He overcame all Her challenges, arguably destroying Her plans, and yet he is “glory of Hera” and She embraced him when he became a God, made him Her son and married him to one of Her daughters, Hebe. How does this fit if they hated each other, as the myth apparently tells? The only explanation is that She loved him all along and all the obstacles were Her way to teach him. And indeed it was the obstacles that

made him grow and reach higher than any mortal ever did – if Hera hadn’t intervened he would be a king; with Hera he became a God. And for learning all his lessons, the Goddess rewarded him.

Other examples are Typhon as a test for Athena when Hera says She likes Athena as if She was Her daughter; throwing Hephaestus out of Olympus being His mother; maddening Dionysus... Even to Zeus She often teaches modesty and compassion by plotting against Him and putting challenges upon His path. That is the Goddess way of saying “I love you, I care for you and want you to grow into a better God/person/animal.”

In cult this was embodied in Hera’s Games at Olympia, a competition open only to women. There was only a foot race, where woman were organized according to age and maturity – the race represented women’s growth into full maturity. In neo-paganism the idea is also present, embodied in the identification of Hera with the Air, the element of changes and variation.

But how does marriage, the stable kind, promoted by the Goddess, fit into this? First of all, marriage is a definite change in life and is usually associated with maturity. In ancient Greece marriage was all about women, it was the bride’s celebration and Zeus in marriage is even referred as “Hera’s Zeus”. The word for bride and woman is the same which shows how this was considered an essential step in women’s maturity. Therefore, as patron of marriage Hera is patron of women’s growth.

In the end we see that Hera is far more than a jealous wife who only plots revenge: She is the Goddess of growth and maturity, the one force that keeps us moving, learning and growing. And for that we can only thank Her.

To Aphrodite

by Nicole Mazza

I sing of you Aphrodite
Who entwined two lives mine
In deep love and sweet repose.
He called of you that day
And you caressed our hearts
And pulled us together like
Ships floating along the sea out
Of which you once rose.
Promises were made to you
And other unexpected gifts received
All from you, oh beautiful goddess!
I sing of you Aphrodite
Let my voice rise to your ears!
Always just beyond my fingertips,
Yet always painting my life,
I give you praise and honor
And gifts of heartfelt words.
Thank you for your gifts to me.
I sing of you Aphrodite
Glorious, beautiful, and bountiful!

Kyklos Apollon Ritual

Todd Jackson

*I*t's fascinating to watch the organic process of a ritual growing into itself. What becomes clear is that what one originally writes can never be the ritual, but only an initial sketch. It is impossible, for instance, when first scripting the ritual to know what-ultimately-will be the first step across the temenos boundary, leaving the mundane behind. One will perform some action prior to the first scripted action; the next time around, one might repeat that action. In time, it will have accrued to the ritual. A dozen such actions, and the original script resembles a plowed, flat farmland in early March. The ritual, the real ritual, meanwhile will have come to resemble a vineyard just before the harvest.

The ritual of Kyklos Apollon, devoted to the Hellenic God of purification, prophecy and the light of the Sun, is an excellent "living laboratory" for watching this process. First, it is atypical within the Hellenismos revival in that it revives nothing, but is entirely new. It lacks even the advantage of having an ancient precedent, itself the organic result of centuries of repetition, whose pieces can be gathered up and reassembled. The initial script, therefore, was a *particularly* flat farmland. Who knew whether there would even be any crop whatsoever?

Further, the Kyklos Apollon ritual has a weekly, rather than an annual period. A great deal of change can happen in just a couple of months. If you're a biologist and you want to watch evolution in process, you observe fruit flies, not tortoises. Likewise, the student of ritual might be better advised to observe the Kyklos Apollon than Thargelia.

Now, just into its third year, this is what my Kyklos ritual has become: The first step across the temenos comes the night before, with the soaking of a cup of bay leaves in wine. There is a story of ritual evolution that is told by these leaves alone. There is no one Kyklos Apollon ritual; I do not have a legion of winged monkeys to set loose across the world, from Las Vegas, USA to Dublin, Ireland to South Australia, making sure that each member of the circle follows my script. The only uniformity is in the time: the ritual occurs each Sunday at dawn, as reckoned at the Temple of Delphi in Hellas. One element of our rituals has become common among us to the point of near-universality: the burning of the bay leaves.

"Bay" is simply another word for "laurel," the tree sacred to Apollon, and the Greek for "laurel" is daphne. Our burning the leaves is at once an offering to Apollon and an act of communion with him. We surround ourselves in, we breathe into ourselves, a smoke that symbolically acts as a natural conduit to Apollon, as copper is natural conduit to electricity. We reaffirm ourselves as being within his presence, becoming, like the leaves, his *symbola* on Earth.

I take half the next day's bay leaves and soak them in wine, and let them marinate overnight. For me, this is a gesture toward Dionysos, close brother to Apollon, Lord of Delphi in the winter months, and linked to him by visionaries from Orpheus to Nietzsche. I remove these leaves come morning and set them to

dry. A warning here: I live in the Mojave Desert, where the wash, put out on the line, is bone-dry in fifteen minutes during summer; your wine-soaked leaves may need a full day or so. While the leaves dry, I clean my home and all the altars. I also prepare the various incenses. Here are my recipes for the flammables:

Hekate: a handful of bay leaves soaked in last week's patchouli oil, three quarters, and some combination of wormwood, marijuana, and tobacco.

Hermes: a handful of bay leaves sprinkled with frankincense and myrrh nuggets, three quarters.

Aphrodite: a cup of bay leaves sprinkled with myrrh nuggets, last week's rose or cinnamon oil, sometimes crushed dried rose petals.

Apollon: a cup of the wine-soaked bay leaves, now dry; two cups or more of bay leaves; lots of frankincense nuggets and last week's frankincense oil.

The last cleaning is of myself, including my once-a-week shaving of my head bald. After the shower and putting on the clothes I wear at ritual, I take another cup of the leaves (not the wine-soaked) and set them ablaze while calling out the familiar Hellenic cry *Hekas, hekas! Este bebeloi!* ("May all that is unclean depart!") that precedes many rituals, adding "May all that is touched by the smoke of these leaves be purified for the ritual." All this day, I've been abstaining from red meat; after this, I abstain from eating altogether, as well as from bathroom functions and leaving the apartment. I open and close the front door at all only because of my full-time job as doorman to my cat, Shaman. Shaman doesn't give a rat's ass about my rituals, bad kitty that he is. His yowling at a closed door would disturb the neighbors. I suspect he's Muslim.

The first incense is to Hestia, I light it while preparing the *khernips* water. I splash the water on myself (and any visitors) before entering my altar room.

Where Hestia does receive her typical honors as first (if not last) of the *theoi* honored, the true "opener" of the ritual is Hekate, and now-at least one hour prior to Delphi dawn- is the time to approach her altar.

I address Hekate, while lighting the tea candle beneath the dish of fresh patchouli oil, and then the bowl of flammable incense, with a stick of patchouli incense. I address her as she in whom commerce between Gods and mortals is even possible, as binder of the circle. And I light the single tea candle that rests upon Persephone's altar-still new, still underdeveloped.

I light Aphrodite's flammable incense and offer her wine mixed with water, and address her as the Goddess in whose power the bay leaf is bound as symbol-recalling here the

(continued from page 9)

Daphne myth, and the crucial role of the arrows of Eros, her son.

Now I'm entering deeper into a meditative state, and the scent of patchouli just accented with rose is throughout the apartment.

At least a half-hour before Delphi dawn, I approach Apollon's altar, not yet for Apollon himself but for the libation cups that serve as shrines to other Gods. First of these, Zeus, as Demiurge. I usually offer him beer. (Yes. Beer. I am yet a barbarian.) Next Dionysos—a cup of wine. I splash wine also into the dish that services my Idios Daimon, cut it with water (Pellegrini, or even better, Greek mineral water), finally lighting a single bay leaf and dousing it in the wine/water. At that point, I take up the twelve-pointed star medallion that always rests on Apollon's altar and is my own insignia as his priest. I dip the medallion into the Daimon wine/water and offer praise to the ancients, which always include the heroes Lykourgos of Sparta and Iamblichus; I address also my own higher emanations, up to the angelic. Then I put on the medallion.

Fifteen or twenty minutes before Delphi dawn, and I splash the Omphalos that sits before Apollon's altar with Pellegrini water, mindful that I am also wetting the navel of the world in Delphi, and declare the Kyklos.

Then I light Hermes' flammable incense, and with his lit stick incense I light Apollon's two tea candles: the one that stands at the front of his altar, and, now, the one that rests beneath his dish of fresh frankincense oil. I address Hermes as the God who holds the secret of magic words and magic speech.

Some minutes before the dawn at Delphi, I sink even more fully into mindfulness. By now, the ritual doesn't feel like a unique event, but like a return to a place that always exists, is always present, and always waiting to be revisited. It has become an eternal point at the center of a life that, otherwise, is passing in time.

I turn on the music. Generally Classical, sometimes Middle Eastern or Mediterranean, with a leaning toward guitar, violin or piano concerti. Often it'll be a piece I haven't heard until this moment, and the sense is of Apollon and I sharing a music connoisseurship.

At Delphi dawn I address Apollon in typical Hellenic fashion, with a string of epithets, and offer a libation of pure Pellegrini water, then set his cup down at the front of his altar; this is the same cup which, years ago, at the beginning of my worship of Apollon, was the very first piece, before any of the statues, before anything. This is the cup that would have been placed, simply, on the ledge of a window.

I light the pot of flammable incense while speaking words from the Homeric Hymn to Apollon (Pythian) which, to me, indicate the Apollonian priesthood:

enth' ek nêos orouse anax hekaergos Apollôn,
asteri eidomenos mesôî êmati: tou d' apo pollai
spintharides pôtônto, selas d' eis ouranon hiken:
es d' aduton kateduse dia tripodôn eritimôn*.

enth' ar' ho ge phloga daie piphauskomenos ta ha kêla:
pasan de Krisên katechen selas: hai d' ololuxan
Krisaiôn alochoi kallizônoi te thugatres
Phoibou hupo rhipês: mega* gar deos* embal'* hekastôi*.
enthen d' aut' epi nêa noêm' hôs alto* petesthai+,
aneri eidomenos aizêôi te kraterôi te,
prôthêbêi, chaitêis eilumenos eureas ômous:
kai speas phônêsas epea pteroenta prosêuda:

“Then, like a star at noonday, the lord, far-working Apollo, leaped from the ship: flashes of fire flew from him thick and their brightness reached to heaven. He entered into his shrine between priceless tripods, and there made a flame to flare up bright, showing forth the splendor of his shafts, so that their radiance [445] filled all Crisa, and the wives and well-girded daughters of the Crisaeans raised a cry at that outburst of Phoebus; for he cast great fear upon them all. From his shrine he sprang forth again, swift as a thought, to speed again to the ship, bearing the form of a man, brisk and sturdy, [450] in the prime of his youth, while his broad shoulders were covered with his hair: and he spoke to the Cretans, uttering winged words.” (from Perseus Digital Library, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White)

Once the fire is well-established, I read the Orphic Hymn to Apollon. The ancient Greek is transporting, and I feel linked to all who worshiped Apollon in the past, all now present and joining in the ritual.

Apóllōnos, thumíama mánnan.

Elthé, mákar, Paián, Tituoktónē, Phoíbe, Lukōreû,
Memphît', aglaótīme, iēie, olbiodōta,
khrusolūrē, spermeíe, arótrie, Púthie, Titán,
Grúneie, Smintheû, Puthoktónē, Delphiké, mánti,
ágrie, phōsphóre daímon, erásmie, kúdime koure,
mousagéta, khoropoié, hekēbōle, toxobélemne,
Bákkhie kai Didumeû, hekáerge, Loxía, hagné,
Dēli' áanax, panderkēs ékhōn phaesímbroton ómma,
khrusokóma, katharàs phēmas khrēsmoús t' anaphainōn;
klúthi mou eukhoménou laōn hūper eúphroni thumōi;
tónde sù gar leússeis tōn apeíriton aithéra pánta
gaían t' olbiómoiron hūperthé te kai di' amolgoû,
nuktōs en hēsukhíaisin hup' asteroómmaton órphnēn
rhízdas nérthe dédorkas, ékheis dé te peírata kósmou
pantós; soi d' arkhē te teleutē t' estí melousa,
pantothalēs, sù dē pánta pólon kithárēi polukrēktōi
harmóздеis, hotè mèn neátēs epi térmata bainōn,
állote d' aúth' hupátēn, potē Dōrion eis diákosmon
pánta pólon kinnās kríneis bióthremmona phūla,
harmoníēi kerásas {tēn} pagkósmion andrási moíran,
míxas kheimōnos théreós t' ison amphotéroisin,
eis hupátas kheimōna, théros neátais diakrínas,
Dōrion eis éaros poluērátou hōrion ánthos.
énthen epōnumiēn se brotoi klēizdousin ánakta,
Pána, theòn dikérōt', anémōn surígmath' hiénta;
houneka pantōs ékheis kósmou sphragída tupōtin.
klúthi, mákar, sōzdōn mústas hiketēridi phōnēi.
(transliteration by Michael Standingwolf)

“Blest Paeon, come, propitious to my pray'r,
Illustrious pow'r, whom Memphian tribes revere,
Slayer of Tityus, and the God of health,

(continued from page 10)

Lycorian Phoebus, fruitful source of wealth .
Spermatie, golden-lyr'd, the field from thee
Receives it's constant, rich fertility.
Titanic, Grunian, Smynthian, thee I sing,
Python-destroying, hallow'd, Delphian king:
Rural, light-bearer, and the Muse's head,
Noble and lovely, arm'd with arrows dread:
Far-darting, Bacchian, two-fold, and divine,
Pow'r far diffused, and course oblique is thine.
O, Delian king, whose light-producing eye
Views all within, and all beneath the sky:
Whose locks are gold, whose oracles are sure,
Who, omens good reveal'st, and precepts pure:
Hear me entreating for the human kind,
Hear, and be present with benignant mind;
For thou survey'st this boundless aether all,
And ev'ry part of this terrestrial ball
Abundant, blessed; and thy piercing sight,
Extends beneath the gloomy, silent night;
Beyond the darkness, starry-ey'd, profound,
The stable roots, deep fix'd by thee are found.
The world's wide bounds, all-flourishing are thine,
Thyself all the source and end divine:
'Tis thine all Nature's music to inspire,
With various-sounding, harmonising lyre;
Now the last string thou tun'ft to sweet accord,
Divinely warbling now the highest chord;
Th' immortal golden lyre, now touch'd by thee,
Responsive yields a Dorian melody.
All Nature's tribes to thee their difference owe,
And changing seasons from thy music flow
Hence, mix'd by thee in equal parts, advance
Summer and Winter in alternate dance;
This claims the highest, that the lowest string,
The Dorian measure tunes the lovely spring .
Hence by mankind, Pan-royal, two-horn'd nam'd,
Emitting whistling winds thro' Syrinx fam'd;
Since to thy care, the figur'd seal's consign'd,
Which stamps the world with forms of ev'ry kind.
Hear me, blest pow'r, and in these rites rejoice,
And save thy mystics with a suppliant voice.”
(Thomas Taylor translation)

Once the flame has died out, but the smoke is still rising, I pass the smoking put around my body while reading the words that indicate and accompany purification. Also from the Homeric Hymn to Apollon (Pythian), they are the words Apollon spoke to

the dying dragon. I find this the most potent passage in all the ancient literature:

ho d' epêuxato Phoibos Apollôn:
entauthoi nun putheu epi chthoni bôtianeirêi:
oude su ge zôousa kakon dêlêma brotoisin
esseai, hoi gaiês poluphorbou karpon edontes
enthad' aginêsousi telêssas hekatombas:
oude ti toi thanaton ge dusêlege' oute Tuphôeus
arkesei oute Chimaira dusônumos, alla se g' autou
pusei Gaia melaina kai êlektôr Huperiôn.
hôs phat' epeuchomenos: tèn de skotos osse kalupse.
tèn d' autou katepus' hieron menos Êelioio,
ex hou nun Puthô kiklêsketai: hoi de anakta
Puthion ankaleousin epônumon, houneka keithi
autou puse pelôr menos oxeos Êelioio.

Which translates: "Then Phoebus Apollo boasted over her: 'Now rot here upon the soil that feeds man' You at least shall live no more to be a fell bane to men who eat the fruit of the all-nourishing earth, and who will bring hither perfect hecatombs. Against cruel death neither Typhoeus shall avail you nor ill-famed Chimera, but here shall the Earth and shining Hyperion make you rot.' Thus said Phoebus, exulting over her: and darkness covered her eyes. And the holy strength of Helios made her rot away there; wherefore the place is now called Pytho, and men call the lord Apollo by another name, Pythian; because on that spot the power of piercing Helios made the monster rot away." (Perseus Digital Library, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White)

By now the altar room, indeed the entire apartment, is pretty much filled with smoke; till the following evening, I and all my clothes will smell of bay and frankincense. I turn out the lights and sit still and silent on a backless stool before Apollon's altar, a chip of amber resin in each palm, for as long as the music lasts—a half hour to an hour—or much longer if I'm doing particularly deep work. Sometimes the music will take me up and I'll be compelled to dance. Good ritual is being pulled into some deep, silent place, while I am mindful of the Sunrise in Hellas, around the other side of the world, while I sit in the dark of Night. Great ritual is light, as though flying, with an electric quality, and when the music has taken over; the whole universe condensed into Apollon, myself, and one piece of great music, sharing a radical presentness.

.Ie Paian.

(For more on the Kyklos Apollon, go to kyklosapollon.org)

“In spring time the Kydonian / quinces, watered by running streams, / there where the maiden nymphs have / their secret garden, and grapes that grow / round in shade of the tendriled vine, / ripen.

Now in this season for me / there is no rest from love. / Out of the hard bright sky, / a Thracian north wind blowing / with searing rages and hurt – dark, / pitiless, sent by Aphrodite – Love / rocks and tosses my heart.”

- Ibycus of Rhegium, trans. Lattimore

Ares and Hestia: Partners in Social Activism

by Anne Hatzakis

There are many people both in the Hellenic Pagan communities and the greater community that we are a part of that would tend to think that Ares and Hestia would never share any duties in the affairs of humanity. After all, Hestia is the Goddess of the Hearth, whose main duties would seem to be in the so-called “peaceful” pursuits of maintaining the home itself and the stability of the community. Ares as the God of Conflict in general and War in particular is often seen as a destabilizing, or even a destructive and negative influence, forcing people to make changes in the world around us, often against our will.

These spheres of influence would seem at first glance to be the opposite ends of the spectrum, but in reality they are not so different as they can often appear to be. Many aspects of the Lord of Conflicts are addressed very well in an essay by Bronto Sproximo on the Neos Olympus website. In it he states that “Modern Hellenes are never sure how to take Ares. There aren't too many balanced views of him. Homer's interpretation seems to be where most people develop their opinions. To generalize, most people seem to be polarized to either disliking his violent aspect, or celebrating it in an unhealthy manner.” I find myself having been guilty of this error in the past and look forward to developing a more balanced perspective on Ares, which is likely to have been closer to the Ancient Hellenic view on this often-maligned deity. After all, if the hill in the city-state of Athens where juries met and philosophical debates occurred was named after Ares, there must be much more to his duties than would appear.

Bronto continues “Some say the ancient Hellenes did not honor him. They were wrong. The Areopagos in Athens is only one example of site devoted to him which survived to our modern times. The Areopagos or Areios Pagos is the 'Hill of Ares', north-west of the Acropolis. The origin myth of the Arepagos is a celebration of Ares as a wise and fierce protector of his children. Apollodorus (3.180), Pausanias and Suidas all recount the myth of the rape of his daughter Alkippe by Poseidon's son Aalirrhothios. Ares slew the rapist and was tried by the gods for it there, upon the Arepagos.”

Bronto uses this information to make several points on social activism that I will now include as well. First, he states “Rosa Parks refused to get up from her seat and created a conflict. Many would argue that much good from that conflict.” One can only wonder how much longer it would have taken for the changes that conflict brought with it to occur if she hadn't “stood” on her principles instead of in the bus.

In addition, Bronto goes on to state “Listen to the drums. Feel the adrenaline rush in your veins and move you to action. Your heart pounds until it is impossible to ignore and you must take action. That action? Vote. Protest. Write a letter. Run for your life. Defend yourself. I battle with many weapons. A blade, my hands, my words, my keyboard. He motivates us to get off the couch and make a change. Not to "sit there and take it" but to take action. He was with Rosa Parks when she decided she needed a seat more than that ignorant redneck. He was with

Gandhi. He was with Martin Luther. He was with Martin Luther King Jr.”

It is notable that the people mentioned used their words, and non-violent actions to bring about change in the world around them rather than resorting to force to accomplish their goals. Although there are those who would not understand the power of words as weapons, both the Lord of Conflict and the Lady of the Hearth, use that power to accomplish their respective tasks in the Kosmos.

Finally, Bronto adds “Spiritual warriors can train their mind not to shrink from conflict, but find ways to use conflict towards positive ends. Conquer enemies, conquer fear, conquer doubt.”

It is the last two items to conquer that are the most important to understanding the partnership of Hestia and Ares in social activism by using the necessary conflicts involved and the partnerships they create to effect social change. To illustrate this point I would like to draw from Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous “I Have A Dream” speech delivered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. on the 28th of August, 1963.

“And so let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania. Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado. Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California. But not only that: Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee. Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring. And when this happens, when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!”

The success of any attempt at social activism depends on not only recognizing the role of Ares in awakening us to the need to struggle against injustice, but also in acknowledging that we need the example of Hestia to build bridges between people so that we can depend on one another's strength. For a single person can sometimes be broken, but even should a struggle take many years if we have the strength of community that Hestia brings with her in her own quiet way that effort will eventually pay off. My late father used sticks to illustrate just how community can make us stronger. If you only have one, it is relatively easy to break in half. But, when you have a bunch of them held together they become much harder to break. The Romans fasces, often associated with the might of Rome, is a good illustration of that principle. And it is interesting to note that the Vestals (priestesses of the Roman incarnation of Hestia) had the privilege, otherwise accorded only to important men, of having the fasces carried before

(continued from page 12)

them in the streets as a token of the importance Vesta, and by extension her priestesses had in the life of that city, or indeed any city of the Hellenized world.

Although, in many ways, it could be argued that Hestia is the most peace-loving of the Olympians and did not participate in violent conflict (after all even the Foam-Born Aphrodite made an appearance on the walls of Troy) there are very few people who will not agree that her gift of community-building is what binds people together in their quest for those things that were embodied in the slogan of the French Revolution "Liberté, égalité, fraternité, ou la mort!" (Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood, or Death!) This slogan outlived that failed attempt at social reform and has been used as a rallying cry for activists since that time. For it was Hestia herself, who in order to maintain the Peace of Olympos denied both Apollo and Poseidon's requests for her hand in marriage, choosing instead perpetual virginity and being honored by Zeus himself with the first and last of the sacrifice along with the sure knowledge that she would be welcomed in every city as well as in every home.

To use some modern examples of peaceful quests for social justice, we can look at the case of the widow of a soldier killed in Iraq is struggling to get the U.S. Veteran's Administration to allow a pentacle to be engraved on his memorial in recognition of his Wiccan beliefs. This man did his duty by his country and now there is a struggle to get his country to do its duty by his family. Ares may be the one leading the charge into the Pentagon, but it is Hestia who has helped make people aware of the widow's struggle and warmed their hearts to help support this quest.

Also, we can look at the struggle that worshippers of the Olympian Gods are facing right now simply to worship freely. They are working both for the ability to worship in their ancient temples, such as the temples to Zeus and Athena in the city of Athens (among others), as well as the ability to build new sanctuaries. Right now, Hellenic Pagan worshippers in Greece are having to face uphill struggles to even have legally recognized clergy and the right to have Pagan marriage ceremonies, birth ceremonies, and even rites of passage. There is something even more disturbing that they have to face in that it is actually a criminal act to "convert" a person away from the majority Christian denomination, so even if a person would make a considered decision to become Pagan, that decision could be used to foster religious persecution. Hestia is there in the middle of that struggle to remind us that no matter our beliefs, we are all part of the community we live in, even while Ares armors us with the courage to persevere in both working for religious parity in our own countries and speaking out for those who have little or no voice in the religious life.

Hestia and Ares work as partners in the arena of social activism, and this is as it should be. They represent in this venue the forces that cause change, and the force that holds us together during the change. Without this partnership, this balance, the force of Ares can be misused for blind violence and cruelty. However, without it, Hestia's gifts can be misused for cruel purposes as well because although she helps maintain civic institutions if those institutions are unjust then the partnership is needed to bring them to just ways. This balance is their joint gift. May we always honor it.



Old Texts, New Contexts: On the Use of Ancient Texts in Modern Reconstructionist Religious Practice

by Phillip A. Bernhardt-House

*A*s Hellenic Reconstructionist pagans, we are very fortunate in having a wealth of documents from the ancient world, spanning millennia and encompassing a variety of cultures, which were either used for or inspired by the particular, demonstrably religious practices of the ancient Mediterranean peoples. The same cannot be said for many Celtic Reconstructionists, for example, who though they might have access to Gaulish and Romano-British inscriptions, the only extended narratives available to them and the only poems and hymns currently in existence in that tradition are from medieval, Christian-produced manuscripts. These were often copied at several removes from the original written forms of the texts, separated by an unknown number of previous oral transmissions from those first writings, and all were produced several centuries after Irish and Welsh paganism were no longer the dominant religions in their geographic areas. This reality is often downplayed or ignored by

even the most ardently academic Celtic Reconstructionists, but that being the case, it is easy to see how classical religions are automatically in a better position in this regard. We can yet lament what has been utterly lost, weep over the tantalizing fragments of known larger texts, and rail at the lack of existence of certain texts which we would find very useful in our practices today, but nonetheless there is a great deal to be found in votive and dedicatory inscriptions, curse tablets and spells, hymns and poetry, philosophical treatises, and learned commentaries (amongst other things) that have survived, which can inform and enrich our modern practices.

But the question inevitably arises: so, we have this Homeric Hymn, but how do we use it? Do we recite it in rituals or memorize it as a devotional exercise? Do we attempt to sing it or perform it in some way? Do we merely mine it for its mythological information? Do we engage in philological

(continued on page 14)

(continued from page 13)

inquiry and determine what stage of ancient Greek religion's development different sections of the hymn reflect? Or do we set it aside entirely as the esteemed but outdated devotional productions of communities so different from our own that they are no longer relevant? While all of these reactions—including the lattermost—might be appropriate in a given circumstance, which one is the most appropriate with any given text? As a devoted practitioner as well as a professional scholar, my answer would be, of course, that context is everything: not only the context of the original textual production, but also the intended context in which a given text would be utilized in modern practice.

What I propose to do here is not to give a prescriptive methodology for the use of ancient texts in modern religious practice—in fact, I would balk at the notion that such a prescriptive formula is either possible, universally applicable, or would be even remotely useful. However, I do think that it is possible to examine one particular text, evaluate it briefly within a number of different applicability criteria, and suggest some ways in which it might be used in practice. The particular text I would like to examine is one that is extremely important for my practice in the *Ecclesia Antinoi* (a queer, Graeco-Roman-Egyptian syncretist reconstructionist mystical tradition devoted to the philhellenic Emperor Hadrian's deified eromenos, Antinous), namely the Obelisk of Antinous, once located near the temple and tomb of Antinous at Hadrian's Villa in modern Tivoli (outside Rome), now located on the Pincio Hill in Rome itself. The text is inscribed on four sides of a large obelisk, with each side topped by a vignette of the divine Antinous and another Egyptian deity. It was written c. 131-135 CE, in Egyptian hieroglyphics but most likely translated (somewhat poorly) from a Greek or Latin original text. There are gaps in the inscription due to destruction and dismantling of the Obelisk over its history. The translation of the Obelisk which we in the *Ecclesia Antinoi* have developed is given as an appendix to the present article; a more conservative scholarly translation and discussion is available in Mary T. Boatwright's *Hadrian and the City of Rome* (Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 239-260.

Historical

As previously mentioned, the text of the Obelisk reveals that, because its prayer for salvation on the East Face includes both the Emperor Hadrian and his wife Sabina, that both of them must have been alive when it was written. Therefore it was written no later than late 135 CE, when the Empress Sabina died, but after 131 CE, the earliest time at which such an Obelisk could be produced for the tomb of Antinous at Tivoli after his death in late October of 130 in Egypt. The original location of the Obelisk of Antinous and the tomb of the boy god was debated widely, until the temple/tomb at Tivoli was found in 2004 and the base of the obelisk was rediscovered at the site. However, from the text of the South Face of the Obelisk itself, describing its location as "in the middle of the border-fields of...Rome," clearly points to a location in the near environs of the Eternal City itself, and indicates by its distinction between "The god, who is there" (i.e. in the temples of Egypt and elsewhere) and the body of the god which "rests in this place" that it thus clearly presents the revelation of the burial-place of Antinous.

Reflective of Ancient Cult Practices

Many aspects of the ancient cult of Antinous are related in the text of the Obelisk. The Megala Antinoeia, the sacred games in honor of the boy god, were celebrated in many locations in Egypt and the Eastern Empire, and the particularities of some of their events as performed in Antinoöpolis (rowing and running) are related on the North Face. Further, the syncretization of the drowned-and-deified Antinous to Osiris in Egypt, reflected in his divine name "Osiris-Antinous the Justified," thus entitled him to receive Osiris' same benefits, with daily sacrifices on his altar (North Face) and with the Osirian mysteries—probably of a quasi-Dionysian character—being repeated upon him as well (West Face). The belief in the intervention of the god in the dreams of his devotees is reflected in the text of the North Face as well.

Mythological

The new god Osiris-Antinous is placed in relation to three Egyptian deities in the Obelisk's East and West Faces. He is said to be the son of Re-Harakhte, and he is the intercessor with Re for the welfare of Hadrian and Sabina; Hapi is also entreated to arrange the inundation of the Nile for the continued fertility and agricultural plenty of the Imperial couple. The rejuvenation of Osiris-Antinous' soul is entrusted to Thoth, whose holy city of Hermopolis was just across the Nile from Antinoöpolis. Additionally, in his Osirian role, Antinous is ascribed with the power of opening the gates of the underworld and passing freely between the worlds in the final pronouncements of the West Face.

Theological

A primary *modus operandi* of Antinous' ancient cult was that the boy god assumed the characteristics of many different gods and heroes, depending on the locality in which he was revered. In addition to Osiris, he was syncretized to Hermes, Dionysos, Apollon, Adonis, Silvanus, Belenus, and a variety of other divine figures in statuary, inscriptions, and on coin issues. This syncretistic theology seems to be indicated by the North Face pronouncements that "He goes out of his places to numerous temples in the whole country" and "he takes on every shape of his heart."

Practical

While a fascinating piece of poetic prose, this text does not lend itself naturally to being recited as if it were a hymn. The text, as a whole, is something of a "constitution" for the ancient cult itself, a statement of purpose and belief to an extent; though such statements are important for a variety of reasons, they do not generally make for particularly compelling devotional proclamation and ritual aural reception. Therefore, how could this text be used in practical situations in modern reconstructionist religion? The *Ecclesia Antinoi* has used the text in practice at the beginning of rituals, to in effect draw sacred space in the building of modern Antinoian devotional locations. The Obelisk is invoked like a boundary stele of the city of New Antinoöpolis, where the business of devotion and honoring of the god, in line with the aims of the ancient cult but in modern forms, might be carried out. We know for certain that the text was never meant to be used in this manner, and yet for modern people its employment in

(continued on page 15)

(continued from page 14)

such a fashion has proven meaningful as a connection to the past, and as an idealized structure for the building of modern practice.

As stated previously, these criteria are not meant to be prescriptive, and may not be applicable to any and every text which one might desire to use in modern practice. However, if one does proceed methodically with a text, splitting up the elements in order to determine what individual pieces of information actually constitute—both individually and collectively—then the practical uses and value of each text might naturally emerge in this process. While most hymns were fairly obviously meant to be recited, and most inscriptions are records of a particular discreet devotional activity, this does not automatically mean that a memorable phrase from an inscription cannot be chanted or used as the basis for a modern hymn, nor that a few lines of a hymn might better inform one's knowledge of mythology in preference to being a catchy and uplifting devotional utterance. The start and end of evaluation of any ancient text for usage in modern religious practice must be the context of its original production and the intent of its present usage. With that in mind, an entire world of possibilities emerges when even the most humble written fragments of ancient Greek culture come to light.

APPENDIX: The Obelisk of Antinous

Translated by David Kraetzer, version by Phillip A. Bernhardt-House

EAST FACE

A request for salvation, which is expressed by Osiris-Antinous, whose heart exceedingly rejoices, since he recognized his shape after revival, and he has seen his father Re-Harakhte. His heart spoke:

“O Re-Harakhte, highest of the gods, who hears the calling of gods and men, the transfigured and the dead; hear also the call of Hadrian, who approaches you! Give Hadrian reward for this, who has done this for me, Antinous, your beloved son,

“the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, who established a cult practice in the temple sanctuaries for all men, with which the gods are pleased; who is loved by Hapi and all the gods, the Lord of Crowns, Hadrianus Caesar, who may live, be whole and healthy, who may live eternally, like Re,

“with a prospering and newly-risen age! He is the Lord of Welfare, the ruler of all countries, the Distinguished Noble Augustus. The nobles of Egypt bow to him, and the Nine Arches are united under his soles as with the Pharaohs, the rulers of both Upper and Lower Egypt. They come to being under his word every day. His might goes as far as the borders of the whole area of this country in its four world-regions.

“The bulls and their cows mingle lustily and multiply their offspring for Hadrian, to please his heart and that of his great and beloved queen, the queenly ruler of both Upper and Lower

Egypt and their cities, Sabina Sebaste Augusta, may she live, be whole and healthy, and may she live eternally.

“Hapi, father of the gods, make the acres fertile for them and arrange the inundation for them in its time to overflow the two countries, Upper and Lower Egypt!”

WEST FACE

The God, Osiris-Antinous the Justified, has become a youth, with perfect countenance and festively-decorated eyes, ...strength, whose heart is glad like the heart of a strong-armed hero, after he received the order of the gods at the time of his death.

On Antinous will be repeated every ritual of the hours of Osiris together with each of his ceremonies in secret. His teachings will be spread to the whole country, helpful in the instruction and effective in the expression. Nothing comparable has been done for the earlier ancestors until today;

And the same goes for his altars, his temples and his titles while he breathes the air of life and his reputation comes to being in the hearts of mankind.

Lord of Hermopolis, Lord of the Words of Gods, Thoth! Rejuvenate Antinous' *Ba* [soul] like all things at their time, in the night and by day, at all times, and every second! The love for Antinous is in the hearts of his followers and the fear of him with all...and his praise with all his subjects when they worship him.

He takes his seat in the Hall of the Just, the transfigured and the clarified and the splendid, who are in the entourage of Osiris in the Realm of the Dead, while the Lord of Eternity gives him justification. They let his words endure on the Earth, because their hearts are pleased by him.

He goes anywhere he pleases. The doorkeepers of the underworld, they say to him, “Praise to you!” They loose their door-bolts and open their gates before him from millions of millions of years every day. His lifespan, never will it wither.

NORTH FACE

The God, Osiris-Antinous the Justified, is there; an arena was prepared in his place in Egypt, Antinoöpolis, which is named after him, for the strong athletes who are in this country and for the rowers and the runners of the whole country, and for all people, who belong to the place of the holy scriptures, where Thoth is.

And they are bestowed with honor-prizes and garlands upon their heads, while they are rewarded with many good things. One sacrifices on his altars daily, after offering the sacrifice of the gods each day. He is praised by the men of the arts of Thoth according to his glory.

He goes out of his places to numerous temples in the whole country and he hears the pleas of he who calls upon him; he

(continued from page 15)

heals the diseases of the needy ones by sending a dream. Once he has accomplished his works among the living, he takes on every shape of his heart,

because the semen of god is truly in his body...his Mother's whole body heals. He was raised at his birthplace by...

SOUTH FACE

The god, who is there, he rests in this place, which is in the middle of the border-fields of the Lord of Welfare, the Princeps of Rome. He is known as god in the godly places of Egypt. Temple sanctuaries are erected for him, and he is worshipped as

a god by the prophets and priests of Upper and Lower Egypt, as well as by the inhabitants of Egypt.

A city was named after him. The troops of Greece, the cult members, that belong to Upper and Lower Egypt, who are in the temples of Egypt, they come out of their towns and villages and are given cultivated land, to make their lives good beyond all measures.

A temple sanctuary of this god is therein, who is called Osiris-Antinous the Justified, built from good white stone, surrounded by statues of the gods and the sphinxes, as well as numerous pillars, as they were made by the ancestors before, and as they were made by the Greeks as well.

All gods and goddesses will give him the air of life, so that he breathes rejuvenated.



Dionysus

by Corbin

Dionysus, Lord of Voices

Appearing in the city street,
Ivy-crowned and panther-coated,
Speaking many tongues together,
Teacher of intoxication,
Herald of his own religion:
Honor and revere the god,
You poets of the sacred songs.

Born of mortal, Theban princess.
To gaze on god she insisted.
Zeus revealed himself in lightning,
Burned her flesh and bones to ashes.
Green vines sprang to shield the unborn
Child, sewn into the thigh of Zeus,
Carried to the sacred mountain,
Nursed by nymphs, nourished on honey--
Immortal child born of death.

Come of age, the god departed,
Journeyed through the lands of Asia,
Taught the Mysteries to mortals,
Conquered countries with his revels,

Spread the culture of the vine--
Sweet the pleasure of the dancing,
Whirling to the many voices,
Ecstasy of knowing god.

Only Thebes refused him worship:
Rulers adamant with power,
Arrogant and frozen-hearted.
So he lashed the town with madness,
Roused the women to rebellion,
Cast them roaming on the mountain,
Freed their willful hearts with shouting,
Till they tore their lords to pieces,
Prideful men disdain god.

Now our nation too is frozen:
Princes gluttonous with power,
People circling dumb with fear.
Dionysus, Lord of Voices,
Will your call awake our cities?
Singer of the wild places:
Blessed are those who know your secrets;
Bereft are they who scorn the gods.