

Η ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ

(THE EPISTOLE)

a quarterly newsletter for Hellenic polytheists

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THE NEOKOROI* are a group of Hellenic polytheists 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.

HE 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 polytheist community. We welcome feedback, and submissions from guest writers. He 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 September 2007. The deadline for submissions is August 20th. Advertising space is also available.

*The word *neokoros* is derived from the Greek words *naos* (temple) and *koreo* (to sweep) and originally meant "the one who sweeps 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.

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Why Hellenic Polytheism?

by Erik Dutton (“Dawnpiper”)

There is a wide spectrum of opinion in the pagan/polytheist community regarding the nature of the Gods. On one end is hard polytheism, which in my opinion is closest to what most ancient Europeans would recognize - in very general terms, the belief that the Gods are fully independent spiritual beings, as autonomous as we are (if not more so). On the far other end is the belief that the Gods are just aspects or faces of some sort of cosmic Unity (actually, farther than that is the “myth studies” model that says they’re all just creations of our collective unconscious anyway, but the stories are still really really important... but in my view that falls outside the bounds of polytheism, and we won’t consider it any further here).

My personal beliefs fall somewhere in the middle, but definitely on the “hard” side.

I believe - absolutely bred-in-the-bone believe - that whatever may be the true nature of Divine Reality, we can’t fully understand it. I am also, at this point in my thinking, a pretty firmly convinced panentheist: I do think that there is some sort of ultimate Unity of which all things, including the material universe, the Gods, and us, are a part, and that it is more than just the sum of its parts. Beyond that, what I suspect is that the Gods are more-or-less independent manifestations or self-revelations of that Power; the appropriate term to use here would depend in part on whether this Power is a Person, or is simply the Ground of Being. Since that’s part of what I think we ultimately can’t answer, I don’t worry too much about it.

It is important to note here that while we can’t fully understand Ultimate Reality, I do believe that we can come to some degree of understanding, and that it is primarily, if not solely, through coming into relationship with the Gods, and more intentional relationship with the rest of the natural world, that we can best do so.

Of course, all of that just answered the question “Which Polytheism?”, which - I notice - is not the title of this article. So - why Hellenic polytheism? Because it makes sense of my experiences.

Some personal background information may be useful: as the son and grandson of Lutheran ministers, I was trained to be a devout Christian. This training failed. I never had any sort of experience of God or Christ in all my life in the Church, despite years of devout (I thought) prayer. When I was 14 my mom remarried and we relocated, and I dropped gratefully out of the Church; I did nothing religion-wise except a lot of reading (I read Huston Smith’s *The Religions of*

Man in fifth grade, and haven’t stopped reading comparative religion yet).

In college I tried out Buddhism for a time; after that I was nothing again for a bit, until I came across Wicca, took some classes and briefly (and disastrously) joined a coven. I was only formally Wiccan for a few months, but it introduced me to paganism and gave me my first actual religious experiences.

The following year I met the lady who would become my wife, but we didn’t start dating for a couple of years, during which time I continued to study paganism (she was actively Christian). When we became romantically involved I decided to try to go back for her sake, this time to the Episcopal Church, where we were together for two years and where we got married. A while after our marriage, however, I realized that I was really, truly *not* capable of being any kind of Christian, even a nominal one.

Shortly after that we attended a series of free “Taste of Judaism” classes at the local Reform synagogue, out of casual interest; we became so intrigued with what we learned that we started attending services, and then were invited to join the choir, and then started studying with the Rabbi for conversion... And then Christmas rolled around, and my wife realized that she was not capable of being Jewish. So we dropped out of shul for a while and did nothing religiously, and I began to revert to my pagan “default setting”. I did rejoin the choir after a few months, and attended the occasional service; and it was here that I had my next religious experiences, of the Presence of (I must assume) the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

That shook me up a bit, as you might imagine; but in a roundabout way it confirmed my tendency toward polytheism. Consider: at that point I had a background of direct personal experience of spiritual Persons from the pagan side, and now had similar experiences from the Jewish side. While the Persons I encountered were clearly not identical, they were also clearly of the same Being-ness, if that makes sense; and I hope it does because I don’t think I can explain it any more clearly. That’s the shortest answer to the title question.

Around that time (1998) we also started attending the UU church at the invitation of friends, mostly because we wanted a religious community, a base from which we could continue our somewhat different spiritual journeys, and UU is good for that.

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Why Hellenic Polytheism? *(continued from page three)*

Then in 2000 I stumbled across the Reconstructionist Religions forum on Beliefnet, and discovered Hellenism.

At that point, I was still sort of drifting theologically; UU is not exactly demanding in the theology department, and I was caught between the two loci of my mystical experience, one recent but effectively out of reach, the other available to me but now several years removed.

Most of what I had been exposed to up that point in paganism was either traditional Wicca, or so broad and general as to be useless to me in my search for a more traditional theology; I couldn't wrap my head around duotheism, the "Celtic thing" never felt right to me despite my bit of Irish blood, and at that point I was not really aware of Heathenism, which would have been the other logical avenue from an ancestral perspective.

However, when I discovered that the worship of the Olympians was not dead, the pieces fell into place - I had an immediate feeling of "coming home," and I knew that I had found my way forward in paganism. The Quakers speak of following "leadings;" I think that is what I was (and am) doing in Hellenismos. From the immediate comfort of the old familiar myths, to the pleasure of finding a way to reconnect spiritually with my native culture, to the deep sense of rightness that comes with answering the call of your Gods, I knew I had found something real and true. I did not connect with the Gods of my blood ancestry, but the Theoi are the ancestral Gods of all Western civilization; the cultures where Their worship first flourished are at the very origin of our history, and They are a vital part of the evolving fabric of our culture still today - They have never truly left us.

Hellenismos - American Style

I have a favorite line from the Japanese writer Basho - I do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the men of old; I seek the things they sought. Surely this is a contradiction, coming from someone who worships ancient Gods and follows a path based at least in part on ancient practices? Perhaps; but not, I believe, completely. I do seek what the Ancients sought - to be in right relationship with my Gods, which were also their Gods - but I do not feel constrained to do this always the *way* they did. The answer, as I see it, lies in the difference between reconstruction and revival.

Speaking again in very broad terms, Reconstructionists try, wherever possible, to celebrate our religion in ways as close to the ancients as can be done; for them, the old ways are generally the best, and the act of reconstruction is itself a form of piety. That said, of course, complete reconstruction is impossible, and even the most hard-core Recon recognizes this. In cases where innovation is required, especially in public ritual, Reconstructionists will generally try to innovate as little as possible, and make clear where the new bits are.

And I'm very glad they do! Their research is invaluable, and there certainly *is* something special about knowing that the words and actions you are using in worship are virtually the same as those done 3,000 years ago... but it's not as vital to my personal practice, which I think of as more Revivalist than Reconstructionist. A sort of "Reform Hellenismos," if you will - like Reform Judaism, I believe that the old ways have inherent value, but that for individual worshippers they are only essential to the degree that they make us more receptive to the presence of the Gods and foster *kharis* (relationship or reciprocity).

A couple of illustrations should suffice:

At the Hearth, we make entirely traditional offerings: the first bites of a meal, some barley or olive oil, lighting a terracotta oil lamp at her shrine (which is in the kitchen, naturally). Hestia, at least as She shows Herself to us, seems to be fairly conservative; hardly surprising in the Mistress of the Home.

For Hermes, on the other hand, who as the Messenger of the Gods and the Patron of tradesmen is the obvious choice to pray to as Patron of computer technology, I adapted the "spinning prayer flag" idea I found on the Internet and wrote a short prayer which I store at the root of all my hard drives on the theory that with each revolution of the disk my prayer is renewed. I also offer more traditional libations on special occasions, such as when I travel.

So what's up with all those Gods, anyway?

For a non-believer raised in our monotheism-dominant culture, real live polytheism can be a stumper. I've seen the above question phrased a hundred different ways - and surprisingly often, the second question is something like, "How do you decide which ones to worship? Do you just pray to whoever you feel like that day, or draw names out of a hat, or what?" If the person asking is Catholic, I usually answer by asking how they decide which saints to pray to... and they usually get it. Everyone else gets a version of the following. (NB: The use of "us" and "we" below refers specifically to my family.)

First and foremost, we honor Hestia. As the hymn says, "Hestia, in the high dwellings of all, both deathless gods and men who walk on earth, you have gained an everlasting abode and highest honor: glorious is your portion and your right. For without you mortals hold no banquet, where one does not duly pour sweet wine in offering to Hestia both first and last." (Homeric Hymn XXIX, tx. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, Loeb Classical Library vol. 57. Copied from the Perseus Project website.)

As a married couple, we honor Hera - we're currently looking for just the right items to establish a shrine for Her.

All of us have a special devotion to Athena - there's not a specific external reason for this, it's purely an offering of the heart (our daughter in particular seems to be developing quite the relationship with Her). My wife and I both do various types of crafts, and so sometimes will remember Her in that way as well. Last year we made a pilgrimage to the Nashville Parthenon, and it was an amazing experience. It may not have been intended as a temple when it was built, but She has plainly made it Her own.

I have already mentioned Hermes, whom I honor as my professional Patron; we also have an Ancestor shrine, where we honor Hades and Persephone and light candles for our honored dead.

We don't really have ongoing relationships with the other Gods, for the most part, but can certainly pray to them as need or opportunity arises. When we go to the beach, for instance, we always take some wine and pour a libation into the ocean to thank Poseidon for His hospitality.

(Traditional pagan religion, and the best of modern paganism, maintains to a much greater degree the connection between prayer and physicality; I find this very compelling. The simple act of pouring a libation or casting an offering into the fire grounds my prayer in the physical universe, and reminds me that I am a part of Ultimate Reality, and that the Gods are equally real and equally present here with us.)

Contrary to what most monotheists seem to think, most of these prayers are not petitionary; we really don't ask the Gods for all that much, other than to remember us with kindness for our past offerings to Them, and to be present to us in our lives. Sometimes, in fact, prayer is as simple as lighting a candle at a shrine and just resting in their Presence; that can be the most powerful prayer of all.

(This material originally appeared, in modified form, at <http://executivepagan.wordpress.com>.)



What We Give: A New Look at Sacrifice

by Aristotimos

Smoke rises toward the sun. The scent of grilling meat permeates the yard. Someone takes a piece of steak from the barbeque and puts it on a plate. They set that plate before a statue of Apollon. Someone is sacrificing to the gods

I have given many sacrifices over the years. They have included offerings of honey, oil, wine and bread. My altar often has flowers, jewelry, barley and coins laid out on it. I have also written hymns, poems, sculpted figures and painted images to honor the deathless ones. One time, I even donated a hive of bees in a particular god's name for a boon granted.

The classical texts are filled with demonstrations of sacrifice. Every cult has left behind evidence that men gave offerings to their gods. In these texts, the sacrifices are often called "pure," "unblemished," and "blameless." It caught my attention and I began to explore what these references meant. In every case, the animals were physically healthy and free from sickness. They were often the strongest and the most beautiful of the herd. The Greeks wanted to give their finest animals to the gods. Their example made me examine what I was offering the gods. If they, my spiritual

ancestors, took such care in selecting their sacrifices that were pleasing to the gods, shouldn't I?

When this journey began, I never gave much thought to where the food I offered in sacrifice was coming from. I bought my offerings at the grocery store and that is as far as it went. I didn't know how it arrived to me under that clear plastic packaging. It is rare today that you will ever encounter the "happy cow" that provides your milk or know the fleecy lamb whose shoulder bone you gnaw on. Most of us would rather not get our hands bloody every time we go out for a hamburger.

I don't think that this is a major issue for most people practicing Hellenismos today. Not every person needs to become a *paganus* in its fullest meaning. There is no need for us all to move into rural environments and raise our own herd of goats. But I would advocate that we all learn a little more about what we eat and offer and how it comes to us.

What I discovered in my own research shocked me. Industrial farming and animal husbandry in the United States is very different from the happy cow on my milk carton.

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What We Give *(continued from page five)*

I knew this on an intellectual level, but not on a day to day one. From egg production to the grain Demeter has given us, there is a large discrepancy in the quality and care the Greeks brought to their sacrifices when compared to our modern practices.

It is one thing to read *Fast Food Nation* or to find out how veal is made. It is another to actually visit a feedlot, slaughter house (meat packing plant) or watch a film that depicts how animals are raised and processed. We aren't giving unblemished sacrifices to the gods when we grill them up a steak.

I will not give you the squirmy details. I don't believe that sensationalism or showy emotional appeal effects long-term change. I would encourage that our sacrifices to the gods be of the highest quality that we can afford. After all, the Homeric Hymn to Hermes shows the first example of free-range, grass fed cattle being offered to the Olympians.

If you were hoping for a gruesome statistic, here it is. The quality of the meat that goes into pet food and your can of Campbell's chicken soup is the same. The U.S. government calls this quality of meat "institutional grade." This is *not* a positive thing.

Summer is here and the barbeque season is heading into full swing. Here are some suggestions for changing the way you offer sacrifices to the gods:

- Become involved in making decisions about where your meat comes from. Be concerned with the quality of the products you purchase *before* they arrive at the grocery store.
- Learn what the labels free-range, organic, cruelty free and cage-free really mean.
- Shop locally at a co-op, greenmarket, and farmers market or from a local farmer whenever you can.
- Go and visit local farms to see how animals are being raised.
- Choose meats for sacrifice that are labeled organic, free-range, cruelty free and do not use growth hormones or antibiotics.
- Instead of buying boneless, skinless chicken breasts, buy a whole fryer. Learn to de-bone the bird at home. This not only saves you money, but it also encourages you to learn how to cook with all of the other cuts of meat.

Z

Behind the Mask of Paian

by Lucas Costner

The god Apollon has appeared to humanity as a mystery from his first epiphany many thousands of years ago. From that point forward, Apollon has captured the minds and spirits of the devoted with an intoxicating aroma and sound that has left deep grooves in the civilization of man today. Throughout history, man has strived to reach a more complete picture of just who Apollon is and what He represents. As often is the case however, just as one mask is lifted yet another presents itself.

"Mystery and imagination arise from the same source. This source is called darkness...Darkness within darkness, the gateway to all understanding." - Lao-Tzu

While it is true that Apollon rides the periphery of reality, between the two realms of dark and light, this is often pushed off and disregarded as a simple dysfunction of myth. However, both in cult and in mythos, Apollon is ever more

clearly defined as a god of this boundary. We all know Apollon as a lord of the sun, but to further understand Apollon we must also look deeper into what it means to be a solar deity. If we are to examine the mythology of the sun, regardless of culture, several things will stand out: first, it is intimately connected with the serpentine; second, it must face some sort of tribulation; and third, it finds its way into darkness. At first glance these three motifs may seem to be very distant from each other, however, when applied to Apollon we find that their disparity actually works to create a unified image. Many Hellenistai are under the impression that the myths and stories of the ancients (while not representing a "this is exactly what happened, word for word" idea) were used as a means to conduct basic truths about the natural order of the world and of the divine. With that in mind, the myths surrounding Apollon and the sun are more than just fantastical tales but actual conveyers of meaningful wisdom.

"To conquer fear is the beginning of wisdom." - Bertrand Russell

A serpent, a trial, and darkness: all three central to the myth and cult of Apollon, and Hyginus' valiant tale of Apollon's triumph over the mighty serpent Pytho easily combines these concepts. Once united, however, what do they mean? To put the story simply, after Apollon's birth (which occurred "wherever the sun did not show"), the god quickly made his way to kill the serpent. Upon doing so, Apollon cursed the beast and "the power of piercing Helios made the monster rot away." Obviously, this myth can be seen as a way to explain the Oracle of Delphi; as the story goes, after all, Apollon took as his priestess and oracle the Pythia, and so forth. More importantly, though, Hyginus introduces us with his tale to the same three motifs found within the genre of sun mythology, but applied this time to Apollon. The serpent has always been in the god's retinue of totemic animals, always shown in ancient art (even as the Python) in complete amity with each other. It is symbolic of his role as a god of healing, prophecy, and even of the sun. As far as the latter is concerned, not only do serpents play frequent roles with the sun in myth, but our Hellenic predecessors even went so far as to attribute the hissing of the snake with the rising and setting of the sun. Darkness comes into play in the myth via a number of different ways: first, Leto cannot give birth in the light of the sun; second, Pytho in essence is an ultimate representation all things chthonic, dark, and earthlike; and third, the sanctuary of Mount Parnassus was itself home to a cave, an entrance to the underworld, a return to darkness. And the tribulation given by the myth is most obviously present in the struggle between Pytho and Apollon. The question remains, what does it mean?

To be connected with the sun, one must also behave in the same manner as the sun. For instance, just as the sun gains strength and power during the summer months, so too must the god. In Delphi, this was made manifest in the fact that Apollon's temple would open her doors during the summer months and then lock them tight for the winter. It was believed that Apollon left the region during this time to enjoy feasting and music with the Hyperboreans in the north. Also, just as the sun is light and heavenly, it has its home in the underworld, where it returns each night, according to mythology. Parmenides of Elea, an ancient Hellenic philosopher, wrote of the mansion of the sun being located in the underworld as well. Moreover, Apollon's temples and sanctuaries were often painstakingly located in the most remote and rustic of locations. As for why, the scholar Peter Kingsley argues that it is for the sacred caves, which were often taken as being entrances to the underworld in ancient times. In support of this theory, we know that Apollon had a cult of the iatromantoi (literally "doctor seers") who operated within the caves using incubatory techniques to reach the chthonic world and find a cure. Most importantly, however, is the factor of the grand serpent, both a symbol of the sun and everything it opposes. In the

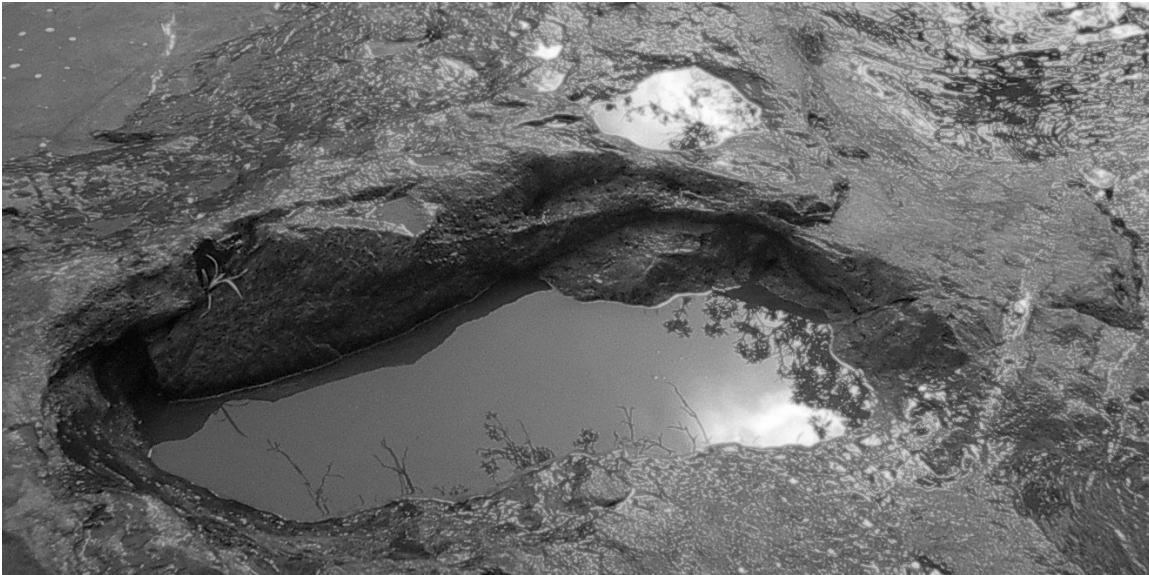
myth we have Apollon, a god of light and reason, descend upon such a serpent, an epitome of all things chthonic (healing power, prophecy, death, wisdom, etc.), and by destroying the creature (by the power of the sun) he appears to absorb the very qualities that he fought against. No longer is Apollon only a god of light and reason, He is now a god of healing, prophecy, death, and wisdom, as well. Perhaps one of the most powerful symbols of Apollon is the kyklos, that is the circle. Just as He is a god of the heavenly world, He is also manifest in the chthonic one as well. In this sense, Apollon is quite alike to the ouroboros, the serpent that bites its tale.

"They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." - Mark 16:18

One the most important features of Apollon's cult, both past and present, revolves around His purifying and healing abilities through destruction. He operates on this level like no other god known to man, He is master and teacher of the shamanic realm, and incorporates ever ounce of His being in His art. For Apollon's reality and ecstasy is not the same as that of Dionysos, it is not orgiastic or group oriented, it is specific to the individual: an encapsulating silence and stillness, only ruptured by the striking staccato of incantatory rhyme. It is within this world of silence and ultimate stillness (i.e., what our Hellenic predecessors knew as "hesykhia") that Apollon heals, it is where he destroys and makes what was once torn to pieces by his own might whole once again. Apollon is the ultimate epitome of masculinity in the Hellenic pantheon. As such, His destructive realm of restoration has a very different feel to that of the other deities, such as Dionysos. Where Dionysos is a god of erasing boundaries, Apollon is a god of establishing them. That is not to say that Apollon enforces limitations, on the contrary in His role as Horios (of the boundary) Apollon helps us push past those limitations and to set the bar higher. It makes utmost sense that on their marches to war, the Spartans stepped to the beat of the Paian hymn, and then back at home danced to it at their festivals for the god. In this aspect, Apollon represents, in every way, mental, spiritual, and physical perfection.

"Here is vision and voice, a pale hand raised in warning, an empty seat in the high hall, absence of the old wise ways, blind eyes seen through the silent shroud..." - Brian Froud

Behind the mask of the healing god, many things may be discovered. Overall, however, it is very easy to see that all of those discoveries are intricately connected. While it is true that a god may wear a mask to present Himself in certain roles, it is also true that He needs not to wear one at all. The mask of Paian removed leaves not another, but rather all of the god's being, which can only be described by His name: Apollon.



“Wide-mouthed Frog” ~ numinous photography by Autolykos

Filicide

by Zoë Melissa

It was actually one of his children who gave him the idea. Little Poseidon came running into the room, and climbed onto his lap.

“Hide me, Daddy,” he giggled. “Mama’s coming.”

“What have you done this time?” he asked smiling, because Poseidon was prone to scrapes.

“Finished off the honey jar,” little Poseidon admitted. “I didn’t mean to.”

“*Poseidon!*” a bellow came from without, shaking Poseidon’s bones where he knelt.

“Hide me, Daddy,” he cried, and crawled under Cronus’ himation.

He rearranged the folds artfully enough, smiling behind his beard. His distracted lady-wife scarcely looked at him when she asked if he’d seen their son.

“No, I thought I heard him outside, chasing gentle Leto’s hem,” he said, enjoying the game.

“That boy—” she said. “I told him I needed the honey for bread. Now what will we eat with dinner?”

“You’ll think of something, my love,” he soothed. “Why not ask Phoebe for some?”

“Hmph,” Rhea said, who did not like admitting to anyone, even her sweet sister Phoebe, that she had lost a finger’s length of control over her house. “Are you alright, my husband? You look gorged, like a suckling pig.”

“Never let it be said, my love, my wife, that you are a poor hostess or a poor cook. I fear my girth is widening as we speak.”

“Hmph,” she said again, but he could tell she was pleased. “You always could eat well, you and your brothers. Sometimes I think you could eat a whole goat by yourself. If you see that son of yours, tell him he’s due a hiding ... and I might find him a fig afterwards.”

And after she was gone, and young Poseidon wriggled out, like a field-mouse, reducing his belly from Autumn tumescence to Winter’s void, he sat awhile in thought. His father had prophesied that he would lose his throne, and he knew he would one day be castrated, or eviscerated, his power and pride tumbling after his lights. He pretended not to see Hades’ too-serious eyes watching him, with a maturity beyond his years. Cronos had already begun anticipating sickle-blows, and wouldn’t this be better nipped in the bud?

Rhea had already begun to swell with their sixth child. He knew with the certainty afforded him and his position, that it would be a boy. A thunderer. With disquiet, he imagined himself dead, and his three sons – dark, quiet Hades; light-haired, playful Poseidon; and the grey eyes of the unborn thunderer – cutting him into pieces.

His appetite was legendary. He could swallow their heads first, and they might never know what happened. There

would be no bones for Rhea to mourn over. She might not even discover what a monster her husband was. And he'd been looking for an excuse to entomb the Hecatonchires ...

He heard his younger son shout outside and felt a pang of pain and loss. If he thought that he could simply hand over the kingship, he might do it – but kinship and guts and fecundity were entwined. He took a deep breath, and hardened his heart.



Library of the Ancients: Archilochos

by Sannion

Of all the ancient Greek authors that have come down to us, Archilochos is probably my favorite. Considering that all we possess of his works is about 60 or 70 fragments – most of them no longer than a line or two, some consisting of just a few words – that's saying something!

Very little is known with certainty about the man's life. He was born on the island of Paros in the 7th century BCE, and was a contemporary of Sappho and Alkaios. His father, Telesikles, was from a noble family and had led the establishment of a colony to Thasos in obedience to an oracle from Delphoi. Archilochos hated it there and left as soon as he had the chance. He wrote that all of the evils of Hellas had converged on the spot, that it was full of ceaseless quarrels, and that nothing good would ever come from it. A quarrel with Lykambes, one of the city's most prominent citizens, may have contributed to Archilochos' hard feelings. The poet claimed that Lykambes had promised his daughter Nioboule's hand in marriage, only to go back on his word. Archilochos responded by writing venomous verse about the man and his daughters. According to one legend the force of his words was so great that the daughters ended up hanging themselves in shame. There's an important lesson there: you don't fuck with poets!

But by his own account, Archilochos was not just a follower of the Mousai – he also served Enualios, the god of war. Archilochos made his coin as a mercenary soldier, fighting in the many border skirmishes of the islands and abroad. He saw death firsthand, and recorded it in an unflinching manner. His descriptions of battle and men tossed overboard to drown midst the wreckage of their ships are some of the most vivid and heart-wrenching accounts of battle to have ever been put to pen. Perhaps because Archilochos was in

the thick of battle, and not just weaving poetic accounts from the safety of some feudal lord's court, he had a very different view of things, and rejected outright the Homeric conception of the heroic ideal. At one point Archilochos brazenly admits that he tossed aside his shield in order to flee from an enemy – a thing absolutely unthinkable for Greece's warrior elite.

Archilochos differed from Homer and Hesiod in many other respects. For one, he was very earthy and sensual, a man of fierce passions. He delighted in wine and drunken frenzy, claiming that it was a source for his poetic inspiration. He could be exceptionally cruel in dealing with his enemies, launching into bellicose rants at the slightest provocation. In fact, he pioneered a whole poetic form to do just that.

Before his time all poetry had been written in hexameter verse. But Archilochos created the iambic – or as Hadrian called them "raging iambs" – modeled after the licentious taunts of the Eleusinian goddess Iambe. And as can be expected from such a name, a good deal of Archilochos' verse is concerned with bodily pleasures and accounts of his sexual escapades. In fact, in one of his most memorable lines he compares a prostitute giving him oral pleasure to a Thracian drinking his beer from a straw. That's not the kind of thing one normally expects to find in an ancient Greek author, and for many years the more colorful verses of Archilochos were left blushing in the original Greek (or hidden under a polite veneer of Latin) lest they might corrupt impressionable Victorian youths.

And yet, Archilochos was not thought of as a gutter-mouthed reprobate in antiquity. His verse was highly esteemed for its innovation, its realism, its striking imagery.

Library of the Ancients *(continued from page nine)*

He was held up as a model of exemplary style and copied by such greats as Horace and Juvenal. He received divine sanction at the most important religious sites in ancient Greece: one of his hymns was recited to the victors of the Olympic games, and when Archilochos fell in battle against the Naxians, his slayer Corax was cursed by the Delphic

oracle for having slain a servant of the Mousai, forbidden ever again to set foot in a temple. Statues of Archilochos were erected alongside those of Homer, praising them as equals, and he was even the recipient of a hero-cult.

As such, Archilochos deserves pride of place in the Library of the Ancients.



Spring Remembers Dryads

by Samantha Frye

Springtime brings the winds that persuade us to open our doors and remove the accumulations of winter from within our homes. From parents to children a tradition of “spring cleaning” has passed down, bringing with it the scrubbing of every nook and cranny, not to mention hauling out the yard supplies for inspection. But as we breathe the new life of spring into our houses, we are recognizing the beams and walls, the roof and floors that have kept us warm and safe from winter’s season.

Not too many years ago I began a seasonal rite at the end of my annual spring cleaning that acknowledges the necessity of these structures. And our dependency on wood that is the building blocks of these shelters. For the trees that were cut down to provide the considerable amount of lumber to shelter me from foul weather and keep me warm in the winter (and additionally cool in the summer), I took to setting offerings and prayers to the Dryads. I admit this was partially inspired by the Aeneid as the trees that were used to construct the ships took another life as those beams later became nymphs. No I don’t think the situation to be the same. I do not think that there are nymphs living in the planks of wood that make up my home, but still I honor the Dryads in thanks. I have seen the effects of lumber harvesting that strips the landscape into a graveyard of stumps. Forests that were once homes to Dryads that

departed are now parts of homes and building across the country. I make sacrifice for their sacrifice.

I begin by setting up an altar in the living room which serves as the central heart of the house where family gathers, and the front door is open to welcome them in on the spring breezes. Here I make the first invitation in prayer, which will often include a hymn. I then continue by approaching each wall in the house, and yes this can take a bit of time. At each wall I hold incense before it and make prayers to the Dryads in thanks for the walls and beams that bring security to my family. After visiting each wall I give offerings at the altar in the living room to the dryads. I lay out a sweet meal for them. A cup of milk is placed before them, a bowl of honey with comb, sweet cakes (like angel food) and fresh fruits that include grapes and strawberries. I have been known to include other sweet foods such as chocolate and candies. Things offered to delight the tree nymphs.

The ritual concludes with music, laughter and dance. And at night after the ritual has been completed, the offerings are taken from the house to the dwelling of the Dryads among the trees. The milk and honey is poured on the roots to nourish the trees, and the food to enrich the earth. After doing so I may spend time sitting among the trees, listening to the song of the wind between the branches—the very voices of the trees themselves.

Fair Aphrodite

by Amanda Blake

Aphrodite, Fair One
Most Beautiful Goddess
No words can describe
The depth of love
The power of desire
That you inspire
No poet, no artist, can even imagine
A shade, a shadow of your beauty
You make my head spin
With sweet desire
You have blessed me richly
With an ability to love
And sent me my lovers
Past and present;
I thank you
For the joy that they have bought me
But also for the woe and pain they have caused
For some lessons
Can only be learned through pain
And the tears of sadness
Made the joy
All that much sweeter.

Things They Never Told You About Forming a Hellenic Ritual Group

by Nicole Mazza

Hellenic Polytheists are generally a pretty solitary lot, but unfortunately in many cases it's not by choice. Many of us find ourselves going to local pagan-oriented meet-ups or festivals and falling through the cracks a bit. Finding other polytheists in the pagan community can be a real challenge for many, and on top of that finding other *Hellenic* polytheists can be even more challenging. Proving to people that ours is a valid religion and not just an antiquated extension of those myths many people read in elementary school can be just as hard with pagans as it is with non-pagans.

So, what do we do? We reach out, be it online or through other means of networking to find people of like mind that worship our gods and, hopefully, might worship them *with* us. Sometimes that virtual world is enough for people, but for others there is a desire to have some real-life worship as well. It's not just a vanity thing, religion in Ancient Greece was community-based and the ritual structures often lend themselves better to group worship over solitary worship.

Finding a local Hellenic ritual group can somewhat easily amend this desire for real-life worship, but what do you do when you can't find any local groups practicing Hellenismos? Well, if you are really dedicated to the idea, you might want to consider forming one yourself. With national organizations like Neokoroi and Hellenion, you can even form a group that is affiliated with them (e.g. an eranos with Neokoroi or proto-demos or demos with Hellenion).

This might sound easy to some, but there is more to forming one of these groups than getting your group's name added as a link on one of those national organization's websites and perhaps setting up a Yahoo! or Google group. I know that when I personally went into it about two years ago, I had a naïve attitude with a "Make it and they will come" outlook and, while that was true in a way, it also took a lot of hard work and a lot of patience. If you think your group will magically come together overnight, I hate to break it to you that it probably will not. Still, if you persevere, I think you will be rewarded.

Things They Never Told You... *(continued from page eleven)*

As I said, I started my own group two years ago called Southeastern Hellenes for networking and socializing and to help bring people together to form local ritual groups around the Southeast (even in my own hometown). At the time the only other Hellenic I knew in Georgia was my boyfriend Ben and other than that I knew only a handful of people in the Southeast itself. In fact, I thought we would be lucky to ever get more than 10 people (our first goal was to build a website if we ever got that “many” people) and here we are two years later with about 70 members on our Yahoo! group. Most of those people are not always active on the list (I will go more into that later), but it was from that group that I was finally able to form a local Hellenic ritual group (both an eranos and proto-demos) about a year ago.

The whole journey so far has had its ups and downs and I have been watching a few people starting their own groups recently and going through similar issues and getting frustrated. I hoped that maybe in writing about my experiences I could give some tips and reassurance to those people who have recently started a group or are considering forming one. Your mileage may vary of course, but here are some stumbling blocks I have encountered and some ideas on how to get past them.

Where to meet and when/how often

So, you have just started your group and maybe at this point it is just you or, if you are lucky, one or two others. Now you need to use the powers of social networking to bring others together. You might even have some ideas about the networking part (which I will go into more below), but for now you are stuck in the logistics of executing the simple things such as *where* your group can meet up. This simple stumbling block can stall a lot of groups, but hang in there, for there is hope!

Some of the most common options for meet-up locations are pagan bookstores or cafés. With pagan bookstores, often you can find people who are empathetic to what you are doing, people who are supportive of you being a part of a non-mainstream religion, etc. This is not always a viable option for many reasons. For us, we didn’t take that route as a) the largest local pagan/new age store takes an act of the gods to get an official time slot at and b) it’s hard to do a meet-up with no real meet-up area (some pagan stores have areas with chairs specifically for social events, but this was not the case locally for us). As always, your mileage may vary.

Cafés are good spots for any sort of social networking in general. I mean, cafés are traditionally bastions of intellectual banter and socializing, so why not use them for your own meet-up purposes? For us, we chose the cafés connected to the Borders bookstore chain. These cafés were chosen due to their close proximity to books since many

Hellenics are also big book geeks – and if no one shows up, you can also just have your own fun looking around the store at books yourself. Plus, you can always work in a drink or a snack with your meet-up, which is usually quite nice.

Some other options you could take advantage of are meeting rooms in UU Churches (if one of your group members is a member of said church, though they might still be available otherwise), college campuses (if you are a student, you might be able to use the campus meeting rooms for your benefit), public parks (you can meet up in park pavilions and maybe work in a small ritual and/or cookout – this was what our group did in the very beginning), etc. There are probably also places that rent/lease/lend out their space as well, such as public halls or libraries. I don’t have a lot of experience in those areas personally, but I have heard that libraries can be a challenge. Still, check out some of your local libraries to see what your options are. You might be surprised.

Wherever you choose to meet up, bring some sort of sign or identifying object so that the new members can find you. This can be an immense help.

Once you find a place, you need to pick a time and frequency. I would suggest whatever is most feasible for you, because oftentimes in the beginning you might be the only one making it to the meet-ups with any consistency. Most important, and I can’t stress this enough, is to pick a time and frequency *and stick with it*. People are generally busy and while they might be interested in showing up at some point, they might not be able to that month, or until summer, or whatever the case may be. If you are continually changing the day, time, and/or place, it makes it harder for people to know when to show up and also makes it a challenge for people who might need to schedule in advance for things due to work schedules, babysitting needs, etc. For us, we meet on the second Tuesday evening of each month at the same café and on the second Saturday of each month at the same park for libation rituals. It’s easy enough to remember so that people who might be interested know when to come.

How to network regarding your group

Networking can be a tricky game, but thankfully there are a lot of resources at your group’s disposal. You can choose options that either cost money or don’t, but I would suggest in the beginning to try to stick more to low- or no-cost options and then maybe add some options that cost money at a later date if you need.

Some free options to consider are things like putting notices up on websites like Witchvox.com, general pagan message boards or mailing lists and/or Hellenic-specific message boards or mailing lists. You can also network in “the real world” with flyers about your group. Such flyers can be posted in places like new age/pagan shops, bookstores, college campuses, pagan festivals, etc. If you are a

distributor of *He Epistole*, it's even highly recommended to attach a flyer of your group so that anyone interested in worship after reading the newsletter might contact you to join your group. Also, depending on the venue available (such as at a New Age store or Pagan Pride Day celebration), it can be free to run a "Hellenismos 101" or other related Hellenic public education workshop and hand out flyers for your group during or afterward. Some of my own group's biggest leaps in membership have come from people who went to one of our 101 discussions and wanted to learn more.

If you want to spend some money on networking, you could also do a Hellenic public education workshop at a pagan festival. Most of the time this will cost money and even if you get a discount for presenting, you will still have to pay some sort of admission fee. But if you are already going to said festival, you might want to take the opportunity to network there with your flyers and/or the workshop (a lot of festival planners are eagerly looking for new people to teach classes at their festivals, so it might be pretty easy to get on their schedule of events). Some other options that cost some money are to take out classified ads in publications like pagan magazines and newsletters or college newspapers. You could also order business cards to give to people as you meet them at related events. This can be expensive or relatively cheap depending on the printing house.

You might also consider having some sort of web presence. This will enable to you share your link with many other websites (especially ones your group might be affiliated with, such as Neokoroi or Hellenion) and make your group easier to find for people who might be looking via a search engine for such a group in their hometown. This can cost money for a domain, but there are free website options also available (Geocities, Tripod, etc.) as well as affinity groups (Yahoo, Google, etc.) that you can use as your website as well. The latter two are particularly good if you do not have any web design skills and don't wish to pay for a service or person to design your site for you.

What to do if no one is coming to your meet-ups/rituals/etc.

It can be common to be the only attendee at your functions in the beginning until word of your group really starts to get around and things start to fall into place. Don't lose heart. I have told many people this, as I know how frustrating it can be when it happens. With my own group, it took a good year and a half before getting to the point that we had any sort of regular attendees (most of the time it was just my boyfriend and I and, if we were lucky, perhaps one other person on rare occasions). You must be patient. I truly believe that if you want your group to work out and you are willing to put the work in, that the Gods will bring you the right people.

Focus on yourself. Set up the meet-ups as most convenient to you in the beginning (unless you are already working with a few people, in which case you might want to work out things amongst yourselves). I always just try and look at it as myself going somewhere and people can join me if they would like. For example, say there is a Greek play going on in town and you think it would be a great way to meet other Hellenics. You mention on mailing lists about a meet-up there and once you are actually there, you seem to be the only person who made it. You can get upset and let it spoil the enjoyment of the play or you can just go on to the play as if you were planning on being there alone. If someone else does show, that's just a bonus. Obviously you want others to join you, but I found when I focused on myself and didn't build up too many expectations for our group events, things became a lot less stressful. Life happens and it's possible that certain people actually wanted to make it to the event, but for some reason could not. This is no reason to throw in the towel; it was just a matter of bad timing.

What if it's been a long time and people are still not showing up? In that case, you might need to look into other forms of advertisement or you might need to look at the time and place of the meet-ups or events and see if that is the culprit. In our case, we had several people on our mailing list that said they were interested, but were not coming due to the inconvenient location. This can be a real issue if you live in a big city and you might need to discuss with prospective members or list members where might be most convenient to them to attend events and go from there.

For example, in our case, in the Atlanta area you have people who will not go outside the perimeter of the city and people who will not go inside the perimeter. Sometimes such a trip only involves about a 10-20 minute drive, but can be a headache if you have prospective members spread out both inside and outside said perimeter. In the beginning, we decided to hold our meet-ups in an area of town called Midtown. This was chosen because it was about equidistant for most of the people in the Atlanta area (hence the name, Midtown, as it is sort of located in the middle of things). We thought this might help bring people together, but after months of people generally not showing, it came to light that the location was equally inconvenient for everyone, so no one came! The people in the north and south side of town that were on our mailing list felt it was too far and it was especially far for myself and my boyfriend Ben (the only regulars) who drove about an hour to get there from the extreme north of town. We finally had to bite the bullet, figure out where the largest concentration of local list members lived, and then pick a new place based on that. For us, of the interested people, there were about 4-5 that lived on the more northern side of town and one person who lived in the south side of town. Because of the larger concentration of people in the north, we moved to a café in the north. I hated moving things even farther from our member in the south, but I decided going with the majority

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The Story of Narkissos

Re-told by Ruadhan J McElroy

Many millennia ago, in the Greek land of Boeotia, there was a handsome youth born to a family of what was then regarded as lesser nobility. They named him “Narkissos,” an adaptation of the ancient Greek word for “numb” because unlike other infants, his birth did not seem to shock him, and he simply took the sudden shock of all the earth’s glory created by both Gods and mortals in such a calm and collected manner as if he were jaded by it all.

When Narkissos grew into a young man of sixteen, he had already acquired many potential suitors, but turned them all away in a callous manner. One day, Ameinias, a young man whose affections Narkissos had been especially toying with, could not stand it any longer and proclaimed, “Beautiful Narkissos, I would rather die than suffer another breath without you in my arms!”

Narkissos yawned and offered Ameinias his own sword, saying nothing that could not be said with more than a cruel smirk.

Ameinias took Narkissos’ sword and walked away, trying to hide his pain. He wandered for hours until he finally returned to Narkissos’ door. Whispering a prayer to Aphrodite and to Nemesis, petitioning the Goddesses to see that Narkissos himself feel the pain of unrequited love, Ameinias fell on Narkissos’ sword and lay there writhing in pain until Thanatos took pity on the man, and Ameinias fell dead. When Narkissos discovered Ameinias’ cold body at his stoop, he ordered for a slave to carry the corpse away, claiming he was “already bored with looking at it.”

Outraged by such an unfeeling rejection of sincere love, Aphrodite set a curse on Narkissos, damning him to fall in love with the ugliest young man he should ever cast his glance upon – and sometimes these things don’t necessarily work out in the most literal fashion. As Narkissos made his

way out that day, he passed wretches of young men – dwarves of ill proportions, men with burn scars and horrible red birthmarks covering their faces, men whose limbs had been amputated from illnesses, men disfigured by curses placed upon their mothers. None of these men were determined ugly enough for Aphrodite’s curse. That is, until Narkissos came upon a reflecting pool. At first alarmed, Narkissos quickly became so enamoured with his own reflection that time just seemed to stand still. You see, even Aphrodite realises that beauty is only part physical and while Narkissos happened upon many men who could be considered monstrous in comparison to just the physical, Narkissos’ behaviour toward Ameinias she found so grotesque that she could not even see his physical beauty any longer. When igniting the wrath of the Gods, it only matters how they define such things.

When Narkissos finally reached out to touch the boy in the water, he realised that it was merely his reflection in a pool of water and became so heartbroken that he felt he had no other choice but to meet the youth’s embrace anyway, even if it meant that he should drown himself. Anything, Narkissos thought, was greater than to live loving a man who he could never touch. And as he began to succumb to death’s embrace, he finally wept for Ameinias as he realised what pain the other youth must have felt, and he begged for the Gods’ forgiveness.

When his lifeless body floated to the top of the water, some nymphs took pity upon him and retrieved his body for proper burial right by the spring so that he could at least rest beside his beloved. Soon after burial, by the grace of the Gods, from Narkissos’ grave sprang a flower, which became named for him so that those who hear of its origins will see it and remember to be kind to those who seek our love, even if we do not seek theirs in return.

“Lead me, O Zeus, and thou, O Destiny, to the end that you have ordained for me. I will follow without reluctance. Were I a fool and refused, I should nevertheless have to follow.”

- Cleanthes

To Haides

by Thista Minai

Thick, enveloping
suffocating
embracing
clothe me in darkness
dancing around me.
black on the right, white on the left...
show me the way down
taking Your hand
my khthonic romance
making my way down
depth of freedom beneath the earth
here i know home
peace in death
hold me forever
i'll die in loneliness
and strength will grow from my rotting flesh

rising again
the sunlight to bright
knowing what i hold within
i am a creature of darkness in light
showing the way down

The Many Faces of Athena: Warrior, Artisan, and Guardian

by Amanda Blake *(partially excerpted from the author's classes on Greek Mythology)*

Athena, or Athene, is the goddess of war and wisdom. As a war-goddess she is the opposite of Ares. Athena fought logically, with strategy and tactics, as opposed to the outright bloodlust and berserker rages of Ares in myth. Although a fierce fighter, she was a merciful goddess; in fact, she often sought peaceful solutions to potentially violent situations. Nike, the goddess and personification of victory was often at her side, as one would expect of the goddess of war who had never lost. Often they merged in the title Athena Nike.

Athena's most sacred animals are the owl and the serpent. The owl is still considered to have an air of wisdom about him, as evidenced by the phrase "wise old owl". The head of Medousa, its hair writhing with serpents, was affixed to Athena's breastplate.

According to myth, Athena's mother was the Titaness Metis, Zeus's first wife. An Oracle of Gaia prophesied that any son borne by Metis would overthrow Zeus, just as Zeus had

overthrown his father, and his father had overthrown his grandfather. When Zeus heard of this he started to worry. He was afraid that history would repeat itself, as it tends to do. But he can't just get rid of her, he needs her. He has come to rely on her wisdom. He didn't think he can rule without her.

So Zeus swallowed her. Now he had her wisdom inside him, and she could not give birth to any children. Or so he thought. Unbeknownst to him, Metis was already pregnant. Well, several years go by and he's had a terrible headache, and the pounding won't stop. It hurt so much that he couldn't keep from screaming, and Zeus's howl was said to have been heard at all corners of the Earth.

So Hephaestus ran to him and split open his skull with a hammer and chisel, and out popped Athena, full-grown and wearing full armor. The pounding had been Metis making the armor, helmet, shield and sword for her daughter.

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The Many Faces of Athena *(continued from page fifteen)*

The birth of Athena directly from the head of Zeus emphasizes one of the most important features about the goddess. Springing from the mind of the King of Gods displays her predominately intellectual nature. And as such she is a patron of scholars everywhere. She is also the patron of the arts, especially weaving and pottery, and anything that requires a craftiness or a clear mind. Athena invented the flute, the trumpet, the earthenware pot, the rake, the ox-yoke, the horse-bridle, the chariot, and the ship. She was also the first to teach humans the science of numbers. As well as teaching women to cook, spin, weave, and sew. Being born in armor also shows her strong War-Goddess aspect.

With Metis as her mother and Zeus as her father, she is goddess both powerful and wise. Metis itself actually means “Cunning” or “Wisdom”. She is often said to be Zeus's favorite child. Indeed she was the only one other than Zeus himself allowed to use all his weapons, including his thunderbolt.

Titles and Epithets of Athena

The Gods have many titles and epithets that reveal certain aspects of that deity. A study of these epithets can be quite enlightening, showcasing aspects and jobs of the gods that are never mentioned in myth. Below I have collected just a few of the epithets of Athena, as well as their meanings and any stories that go with them.

Athena is quite often called Pallas Athena. When Athena was young, her favorite companion was a mortal girl called Pallas. Pallas means “young woman,” but retains a masculine connotation and may have been used the way we now use the word “tomboy”. The two were inseparable, honing their fighting skills and always playing together. One time, during a practice sparring session, Athena accidentally mortally wounded her best friend with a javelin. Grieving sorely for her death, she took on her name as part of hers and henceforth was often referred to as Pallas Athena. Athena learned painfully the importance of control and self-discipline, traits that she can teach to us.

Probably another of Athena's most well known surnames is Parthenos, “Virgin,” for which her main temple in Athens, the Parthenon, is named. Athena was the embodiment of purity, as well as wisdom.

In her most warlike aspect she was called Areia. She was also called Axiopoenos, “Avenger,” and it was under this name that Herakles built the temple to her at Sparta. Promakhos, “She Who Stands On The Front Lines,” is another epithet that emphasizes her as a war-goddess. Alakomene, “the Parrier,” touts her skill on the battlefield.

It is her titles Polias and Polioukhos, meaning “of the city” and “lady of the city,” that call on her both as the goddess of

civilized life and as the protector and defender of cities under siege. In Athens with the name Paionia she was a healing goddess, and under Xenia a goddess of hospitality. Pronoia names her “Providence.” It was Athena Ergane, “Worker,” that presided over artisans and craftsmen.

Her title Glaukôpis, “Owl-eyed,” refers to her shrewdness, and her sacred animal, which is symbolized on the Athenian coin, the drachma. Athena is often called simply the gray-eyed Goddess or Athena gray-eyed. The reference to gray eyes seems to be linked only to Athena and could easily be interpreted as a reference to or symbol of her clear mind. There is one weird reference by Pausanias about Athena having blue eyes. That seems to come from a Libyan story that Athena was the daughter of Poseidon and the nymph of Lake Tritonis, and because of that has blue eyes like her father. But this story is not generally accepted. Most of Greece saw Athena as the daughter of Zeus (as does this author). But it does put an interesting twist on the feud that Athena and Poseidon had going on, and their dispute over Athens. Teenage rebellion, perhaps? It is food for thought, at least.

Tritogeneia was another epithet of Athena's. It could have come from three different sources. Geneia means “born” in Greek, and so it could have been a reference to the idea that Athena was born from the Lake Tritonis. But Carl Kerényi says that it more likely originally referred to a birth from water itself, rather than a particular lake. The name Triton does seem to be associated with water in general, and more specifically, the sea. Triton is in fact the name of a sea-god. It also could have been from tritô, the Aeolian word for “head,” therefore “head-born” – an obvious reference to her birth from Zeus' head. The other idea is that the trito was from the root meaning “three” and that she was the third child (she was the third Olympian daughter of Zeus after Artemis and Apollo).

The Athenians referred to Athena as “Our Kore.” While this literally means “Our Maiden,” Kore is a title of Persephone, Queen of the Underworld, so this title could refer to an Underworld aspect that is not emphasized in myth.

The Goddess and Patriarchy

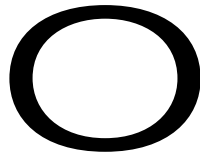
Much has been made of Athena's apparent endorsement of patriarchy. She was lauded as a goddess with no mother, and therefore none of the fragilities of her sex. Indeed in her city, the home of democracy, women were not allowed to vote. Men were believed to be the sole father of children, with the mother simply providing a warm place for the infant to grow. In the play *Orestes*, at a trial of father-right versus mother-right, Athena casts her vote for the men. The playwright even has her say “For no mother gave me birth, and in all things, save to give myself in marriage, the male side has my heart.”

However, Athena was a goddess of the state, a protector of law and civil order. As such, she was portrayed in a way as to reflect the dominant social views of the time; namely that women are inferior. In those days, men *were* more interesting, more capable, than women. Women were not given the education, the chance needed, to reach their potential.

But no more. These are new times, and we have new governments and new laws. Women are no longer subservient to men, but full and independent beings in our own right. I do not believe Athena to be a misogynistic goddess. In my experience, she doesn't really care what your

gender is. Athena is a Goddess who holds each person responsible for their actions. She expects us to reach our full potential; in fact, she demands near perfection.

As anyone who has read the *Odyssey* knows, one of Athena's defining characteristics is that of the Protector of Heroes. She is always a wise councilor to those she protects, but she acts as guide, not a shield to the world. Athena will help the hero down his path, but she does not coddle him. In the end, it is he who must walk the path. Athena pushes us to grow, and challenges us to push past what we think are our boundaries.



A Brief Overview of Greco-Egyptian Syncreticism

by Sannion

Greco-Egyptian syncreticism is a modern reconstructionist faith, or more accurately, a continuum of faiths. There is no central authority, no universal set of beliefs or practices to which all Greco-Egyptian syncreticists ascribe. What binds us together is our shared interest in the two great cultures of antiquity, Greece and Egypt, and the ways in which they met and mutually inspired each other in the past and continue to do so today.

Beginning around the third millennium BCE there were extensive contacts between Greece and Egypt via trade, war, and travel. The two cultures influenced each other at all levels of society, but most notably in the realms of religion and philosophy. Many of Greece's most famous sages were said to have studied in Egypt, and some of her gods – most notably Dionysos and Demeter – were even thought to have been Egyptian imports. Many other Egyptian gods, such as Ammon, Thoth, Anubis, and the Nile were highly regarded in Greece. As early as the 7th century BCE, a permanent Greek trading port or *emporion* was set up at Naukratis in Egypt, and temples to the Greek gods Hera, Aphrodite, Apollon, and the Dioskouroi were built there. These Greeks came to have a lasting influence on Egyptian society at the time, holding diplomatic positions, serving in the military, and fostering an exchange of religious, artistic, and philosophical ideas.

Later on Alexander the Great conquered large parts of the east, including Egypt which he liberated from the cruel and

tyrannical rule of the Persians. His successors, the Ptolemies, took over Egypt after his death and built their capital in Alexandria. They adopted many of the native Egyptian religious and political practices, especially those concerned with the Divine Kingship, and fostered a glorious multicultural society which fused the best of Greek and Egyptian ideas producing a powerful synthesis that would go on to inspire history's greatest minds down through the centuries.

The Ptolemies took a keen interest in religious matters: they built lavish temples to the gods, both Greek and Egyptian, personally oversaw the cults of deities such as Serapis, Isis, Dionysos and Demeter, and encouraged the study of philosophy and the sciences. Hellenistic religion was rooted in the old civic or polis religion of the past, giving it an invigorating boost of energy that it had begun to lack during the ceaseless wars leading up to Alexander's reign. But it also developed an increasingly strong sense of the individual and his personal spiritual needs, and thus private religious organizations, mystery-rites, magic, astrology, and philosophy – especially Stoicism and Platonism – came to dominate the scene. Another important element in Hellenistic religion was syncreticism, or the identification of deities across national boundaries based on a similarity of cult practice, mythology, area of influence, or the worshipper's own personal experience. The gods were no longer seen as tribal entities with a limited sphere of power – but as truly universal beings known under a variety of names

(continued on page eighteen)

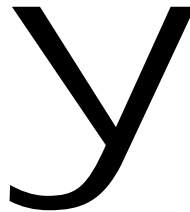
Greco-Egyptian Syncreticism *(continued from page seventeen)*

and worshipped according to differing rites in different lands. Some believed that a pair of distinct divinities could merge into a third separate entity, thus Apis and Osiris had become Serapis; Demeter and Aset became Isis; Hermes and Anubis became Hermanubis, or again Hermes and Thoth became Hermes Trismegistos. Taken to an extreme, this could become a sort of monotheism, especially when it was allied to solar worship – but the average person continued to believe in a multitude of divine beings, and simply accepted that his neighbors were worshipping the same gods as him, just in the manner appropriate to them. This world vision continued to have lasting vitality long after the last Ptolemy passed from the pages of history. The cult of Isis and Serapis was wildly popular in Rome and temples to the pair called Iseums or Serapeums have been found as far away as Portugal and Britain. The last temple of Isis in Egypt, situated on the island of Philae, was closed in the fifth century CE. There is evidence that the worship of the Greco-Egyptian gods continued clandestinely for another

two or three centuries, and through the works of the Neoplatonists and Hermeticists would go on to influence the Western occult, mystical, and philosophical traditions down to the present age.

We today consider ourselves heirs of this spiritual tradition. We stand at the crossroads between Greece and Egypt, and seek to reunite these two glorious traditions. We do this each in our own way. Some embrace a true fusion of the two, and are reconstructing the religious practices of the Pharaonic, Ptolemaic, Hellenistic and Roman eras. Others may consider themselves predominately one or the other, but for some reason feel a call to include a deity or group of deities from the other camp into their own personal worship. Some accept the essential unity of the different gods; others see them as entirely separate and honor them with culturally-specific rites.

For more information, visit Neos Alexandria at: http://www.geocities.com/neos_alexandria



Review: *Portrait of a Priestess: Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece*, Joan Breton Connelly

by Thista Minai

As Brunilde S. Ridgway wrote for a review printed on the back of *Portrait of a Priestess*, “There was a great need for a book of this kind.” Connelly has produced an incredible work that explores every aspect of priestesses’ lives. Each chapter contains a wealth of information that would be invaluable to anyone trying to reconstruct or reinterpret ancient Greek religion. Each page is rich with examples, and sources are cited frequently and well.

The table of contents itself gives a fair summary of what the book covers: Introduction: Time, Space, Source Material, and Methods; Paths to Priesthood: Preparations, Requirements, and Acquisition; Priesthoods of Prominence: Athena Polias at Athens, Demeter and Kore at Eleusis; Hera at Argos, and Apollo at Delphi; Dressing the Part: Costume, Attribute, and Mimesis; The Priestess in the Sanctuary: Implements, Portraits, and Patronage; The Priestess in Action: Procession, Sacrifice, and Benefaction; Priestly Privilege: Perquisites, Honors, and Authority; Death of the Priestess: Grave Monuments, Epitaphs, and Public Burial; The End of the Line: The Coming of Christianity.

When I initially purchased this book online, I was somewhat concerned that it would cover only information on the Goddesses mentioned above, and it would exclude others such as Artemis, in Whose favor I am forever biased. However, when I finally received and began to read the book, I discovered that it discusses evidence from a multitude of priesthoods, and even includes – much to my delight – a hearty section on the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia in Messene.

Portrait of a Priestess also contains other treasures hidden amongst the pages. Much can be learned about the roles and attributes of priests through Connelly’s occasional comparisons of priests and priestesses. Specific traditions and practices fill the pages as evidence, such that just about anyone honoring almost any Hellenic deity could find something here useful for modern worship. Ultimately, anyone who honors the Hellenic Gods or who wants to learn about ancient priestesses will find this book to be an irreplaceable resource.

Hymn to Honeyed Aphrodite

by Aristotimos

Sing to me O Muses of mighty Kypris
Who brought great Gaia from bareness to bloom.
She who was born from the foaming waves
Of undying Okeanos, ever flowing.
Sing of she who set her feet upon the sand
Causing radiant flowers to spring up.
At setting her white ankles on the shore
She began to dance across the wide earth.
Her bright locks spilling forth in frenzy
Catching Helios's bright rays,
Shone brighter than a torch in darkness.
Laughter came flying from her shell-like lips.
In that blessed mixing of gold and dance,
The honey bee first took wing
To pollinate the flowers of
Aphrodite's quick footed joy.
Those tireless workers fill the earth
With the goddess's petaled stepping.
She commanded them to produce
The sweetest of offerings to men.
They change in the hidden depths
Of craggy rock or tree bole,
Helios's light and her flowers
Into sweet golden mysteries.
It was Kypris who put the love of men
Into the crafty heart of Prometheus.
She caused him to steal fire from
Almighty Zeus of Thunders,
To deliver men from eternal darkness.
It was she who came to him in secret
Under the veil of sable-robed Night,
To dress his wounds and wipe his brow.
All praise to thee O Foam Born One,
The deathless goddess who delivered
Men from the unending Night.
All praise to thee O Honey Blossomed One
Who sets the bee to its task
And keeps the whole world in bloom.
Farewell to thee Aphrodite
And you too immortal singers, the Muses,
I will remember you in another song.

On Images

by Calixto M. Lopez

Images and their use are an unmistakable part of Hellenismos. Whether we refer to the past or the present, images (*eidoloi*, sing. *eidolon*) are omnipresent. Almost every ancient temple had images in their sanctuaries, whether a cult image (ranging from crude clay images, to carved wooden images so old their provenance was forgotten, to massive chryselephantine statues such as those built by Pheidias) or votive statuary presented by grateful worshippers. Today, most every worshipper of the Hellenic deities, like their spiritual ancestors, maintains domestic shrines with statuettes and paintings of the gods worshipped in the household.

This is such a common phenomenon that few really think about it. But what exactly is the role of images in Hellenismos? A casual observer may be forgiven if they come away with the impression that we in some way worship these images. After all, they are placed on or before our altars and seem to receive cult from us. We seemingly pray to them, burn incense before them, and make offerings to them.

Is this truly the case? In the ancient world, those who worshipped the actual images, or who paid excessive attention to them, were considered guilty of *deisidaimonia*, literally “fear of the Gods.” We know this term in English via the Latin translation, superstition from *superstitio*.

Superstition is also what we may term this today, and I will use the term henceforth. Superstition was an excessive piety towards the gods, manifesting in a fear that the gods would take offense at minor matters or perceived lack of devotion to them.

Pagans of sound mind rejected still another model of divine relations: the servile model. The man who constantly trembled with fear at the thought of the gods, as though they were capricious and cruel masters, projected an image unworthy of the gods...such fear of the gods (*deisidaimonia*) was what the Romans meant by ‘superstition.’¹

Such people were known to visit the images daily, and fuss with the peplos woven as an act of devotion to the deity, wash the image reverently, and speak to it as if it were his friend. They abased themselves in the hope of averting divine wrath.

People smiled when women went to the temple and told the goddess Isis their troubles...Leave it to the Common people to

spend all day in the temples waiting on their gods like slaves, behaving like valets and hairdressers before the statues of their deities.²

Indeed, one philosopher asked dismissively, “What need has a god for body-servants?” Heraclitus said: “Those who draw near to lifeless images as if they were Gods, act in a similar manner to those who would enter into conversations with houses.”³

This, I believe, we would agree is superstition. If excessive devotion to an image is superstition, is an excess in the other direction, towards an aniconic worship, also a vice?

I would argue that it is not, because the use of images was not necessary at any time in the worship of the gods. The earliest forms of Hellenic worship were aniconic. Worship was carried out on mountain tops or near fissures in the earth (for the ouranian and chthonic deities respectively), or before a tree sacred to a god, such as a palm tree at Delos (as depicted on a Bronze Age gemstone), or at an oak tree at Dodona (per Homer and Herodotus), or a place whose uncanny beauty or a lightning strike indicated the presence of the numinous. Most sanctuaries, even in the Classical Age and later, were exactly of this type. In the medieval period, after the acts of Theodosius, worship of the gods had to become aniconic, as the use of images marked one out for persecution. Yet the worship continued for quite some time in this state.

Even in sanctuaries with cult images, most worship took place away from the cult image. The image was housed inside the temple, off-limits to most worshippers. Worship took place outside, in the forecourt of the sanctuary where the altar was. It was around the altar that people worshipped, just as in the aniconic sanctuaries in the hills and wilds of Greece. No image was directly present at this worship. Today, I worship deities for whom I have no images, and it doesn't prevent me from saying my prayers and offering my incense at my shrine for them.

So if images are not necessary, what is the role of images in Hellenismos?

I believe their role is to serve as symbolic representations of the presence of the deities depicted. The cult images of the great temples symbolized the presence of the deity in his or her house (the temple), and by extension their presence and protection over the city in which or near which the temple lay. An image in the home symbolizes the presence of the deity in the home with their worshipper.

Beyond just this, they also serve as reminders of the presence of the deities, and of their influence in our life. Say you have a picture of your wife. If someone asks about your wife, you may point at her picture, and say; "That's my wife." No one would be so feeble minded as to confuse the picture of your wife with your wife herself. This would be true even if you look lovingly on the picture, or place flowers by the picture, and small gestures of affection like that. Just as one places a photographic image of one's wife or spouse on one's desk to symbolize their presence in one's life, and also to remind oneself of one's beloved, the same goes for placing an image of a deity in one's home or on an altar. There is no superstition involved in this use of images, to symbolize the presence of the deity and to remind us of Them.

The symbolic nature of the image also serves as a means for us to express our devotion to the deity. Veneration and offerings made in the presence of the images, which symbolize the presence of the deity, symbolically go through the images to the deity whose likeness they are. Images thus

serve as a medium through which the gods teach us (through representations of mythological scenes), and touch us.

We can see and believe this, without believing that the images themselves have some property or virtue worthy of worship. Nor is it necessary to go to the extreme of superstition in the adoration or veneration of the image to achieve the benefits of the symbolic presence of (and connection to) the deities.

In summary then, ideally images in Hellenismos serve to symbolize the presence of the deity (the function of the cult image), as well as serve as reminders of and conduits to the deity.

Notes

¹ Veyne, Paul, *The Roman Empire*, Harvard University Press, 1986 p. 211)

² Ibid, p. 212

³ Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*, Bk I.



Things They Never Told You... (*continued from page thirteen*)

was best. After that, we started to finally have regular attendees.

Also, one last important thing to remember is to not expect everyone who shows interest to show up at things or be active in the group. For example, if you run a Yahoo! group for your ritual or networking group and you have 20 members on that group, don't expect those 20 members to necessarily be active in your events. Some people on such mailing lists are passive members and like to just watch what is going on and not necessarily join in on things. I stress this because I have seen many instances where group owners get angry that not everyone is participating in things. I can tell you from experience that my group, while pretty active compared to most, only has about four very active members and a handful of people who attend things on occasion. That is in contrast to the 70 or so members on the list and maybe the 20 or so people who are local to my specific ritual group (as the mailing list is regional). I could get frustrated that not everyone is participating, but I try to not waste my energy on that and instead focus more on those that do. Besides, some of those lurkers might just be waiting until

they have a free night or even to see if your group is stable before participating. You never know.

What to do if you have never run a ritual/don't have any rituals

So, you have managed to finally find a good place for people to meet-up and now you want to try your hand at doing rituals with these people. What do you do if you have never run a ritual or you have no rituals to work with? This was certainly the case for our group.

I was pretty new to Hellenismos when I started my group, but I felt pushed by the Gods to put everything together anyway. I had never really been in rituals before save one or two and I certainly had no idea how to write one. Still, I didn't let that stop us. In the beginning, we did things very simplistically. As a proto-demos, we followed the Hellenion monthly libation schedule. When we started doing these libation rituals (which at the time consisted of just Ben and I), all we did was read a hymn (usually a Homeric hymn, sometimes an Orphic or other hymn) to the deity we were honoring that day and poured the libation. As we got more

confident and got more people down the road, we started adding more elements and filling out the ritual more. Now our libation rituals have taken on a life of their own.

For libation rituals and many rituals in general, there are also many online resources that have ritual templates and examples that you can use for your own group. For libations specifically, Gitana's "Hellenion Proto-demos tes Hagnes Persephones" website has ritual scripts that we found very useful in putting together our own rituals (in fact, for our first libation with more than Ben and I, we used one of her libations rituals directly). Otherwise, for various festivals and other rituals, many Hellenic websites post rituals for reference for practitioners. There is also the "Hellenic Ritual" Yahoo! group that I have been personally using to collect all of the various rituals that I find online into one place.

Once you start holding rituals, writing your own rituals should become easier. I was once concerned that I could never write my own rituals, but I have found a great love for composing them now and it seems to get easier and easier with each one I write. In the end though, I have a gut feeling that the Gods are just happy that we are honoring them again and would be content with anything we do in that regard, even if it is just reading a Homeric hymn and pouring them a libation of wine. At least, that is how I feel on things.

Choosing the best Hellenic holidays for your group to celebrate

So, now you have some reference materials on rituals and you want to start celebrating some of them and then you realize that the Athenians celebrated *a lot* of festivals and that was just the Athenians, as the rest of Greece had their own festivals as well! Don't fret. Just as you probably don't celebrate every American holiday, you probably don't need to celebrate every Ancient Greek one either. If you wish to celebrate all of the holidays, feel free to try, but my advice in the beginning of your group is to celebrate just a few and add more as you get more comfortable or get more people involved. Our group has a rule of roughly one festival ritual a quarter, but that is not hard and fast and was only set into place so that we don't get too carried away and burn ourselves out.

Some other ideas might be to focus on a particular deity or group of deities. Many proto-demoi, demoi, eranoi, and other ritual groups have one or more patron deities for themselves or their group. So for instance, if your group's patron is Zeus, your group might just focus on celebrating all or as many of the Zeus related festivals as possible. If your group has two patron deities – say Zeus and Athene – then your group could focus on celebrating all of the Zeus and Athene rituals or alternate between the two. For us, our three most active members' patron deities dictate our ritual calendar for this year and each of the quarters of the year has

a celebration planned for one of our deities with the final quarter being a ritual to all of the Gods. This is flexible and will probably change as we are starting to get more members as this year has progressed, but it was a good start and has worked for us.

Some other ideas for things to do once you get people together

Rituals can be a great way to spend time with your fellow Hellenics, but Hellenismos is a community-based religion and you might want to work in more socially-oriented events as well. They can have a spiritual bent themselves or maybe just relate to Greek culture, but I find they are very good for fostering relationships within your group.

One idea is altar/shrine craft nights. You can all get together at a public place or a member's house and create crafts related to the Gods. This can be anything from making a Zeus Ktesios shrine, to using modeling clay such as Sculpey to create objects for your altars/shrines (e.g. an owl for Athene), to making a deity-themed scrapbook. Get creative!

Another idea is symposia. Again you can all get together in a public place or a member's house, but this time you can set up a discussion of Ancient Greek topics and share some wine with each other (and even the Gods with libations if you wish). The topics of discussion can range from philosophy, to religion, to myths. It is a great way to get to know your fellow group members and how they feel about certain topics.

One thing that our own group has recently started is what we call "Lectio Homérica." It is based on the divine reading of scripture in the act of Lectio Divina, except in this case we are using the Homeric Hymns instead of the Christian Bible. In the Lectio Homérica practice, your group gathers in a quiet place (a member's home might be best suited for this), someone reads the hymn(s) you have chosen for the evening, people then silently meditate on the words of the hymn(s) for a set time, and then afterward people can share their thoughts and feelings from their meditation. It's definitely an interesting alternative to ritual for a spiritual group event.

Some other ideas are Greek-related events going on in your city or town. These can include things like Greek Festivals (which, while modern in nature, often have shops with Ancient Greek themed items), Ancient Greek plays, Ancient Greek exhibits at local museums, movies about Ancient Greek themes (our group saw the recent "300" together), etc. A lot of these events can include people meeting up for coffee and discussion afterward. The possibilities are endless!

Anyway, I could go on and on about other tips and experiences from running my own group, but I hope this will suffice in answering some of the questions you might have had. If you have more, ask around the community for

advice and tips. Also, you might consider looking at books on group dynamics and conflict resolution because we all know that Hellenics can be a passionate bunch and sometimes that comes out in negative ways. One book I would highly suggest is Amber K's *Covencraft*. While your group may not have a lot in common with the more witchcraft aspects of the book, I think she has a lot of good information about forming a group, dealing with personality conflicts, networking, etc.

I wish you best of luck in your endeavors if you decide to create your own group or have recently created one. It can be frustrating from time to time, but overall I think having a Hellenic group of my own has really enriched my life in so many ways and there are so many times I feel as if the Gods are opening doors for me now that I have shown them I am truly dedicated to making my group work. I hope things will be the same for all of you.

Η ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ (He Epistole)

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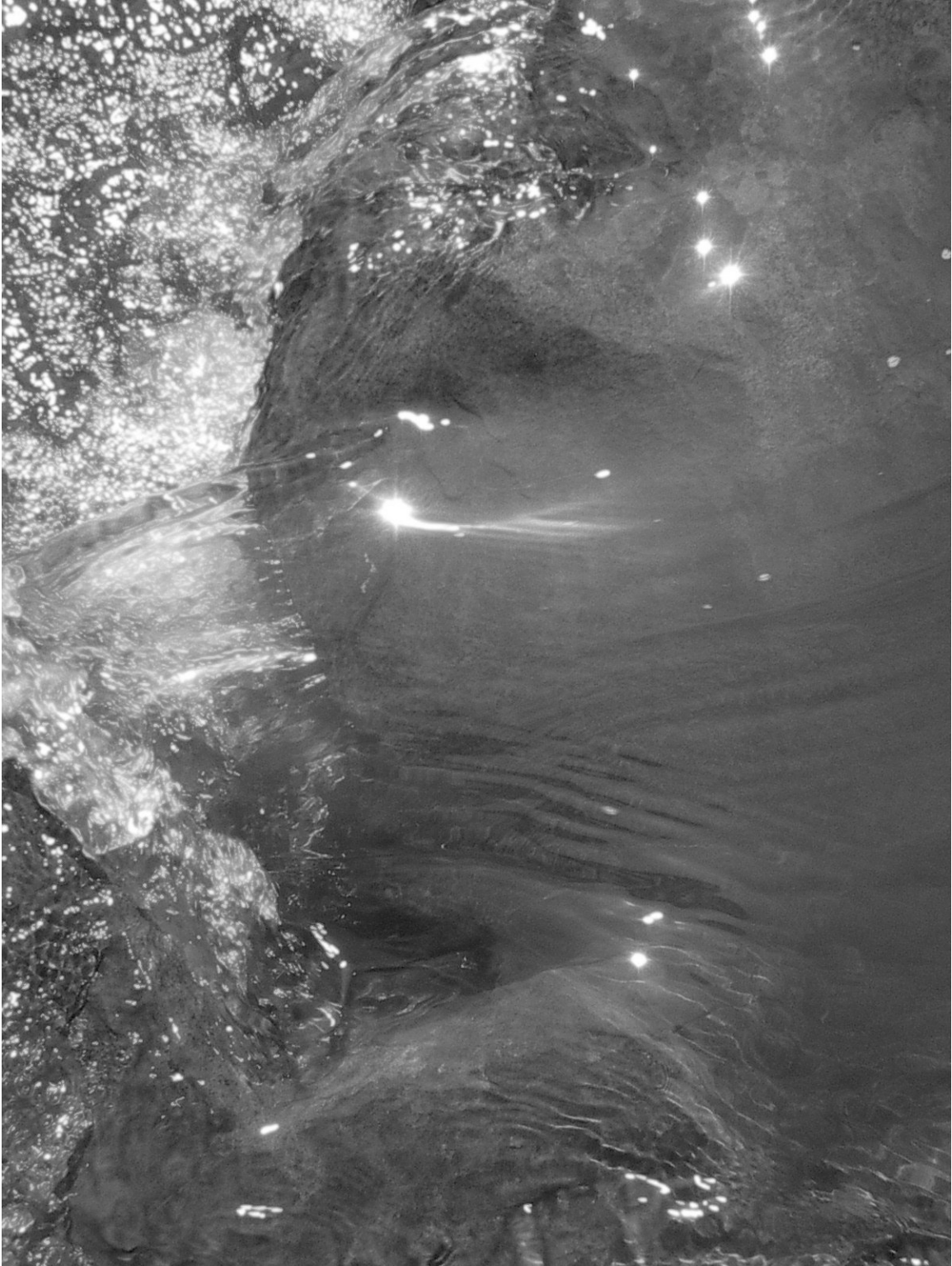
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