

Η ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ

(THE EPISTOLE)

a 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. 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 also be downloaded in PDF form from the website for free.

To contact the editor, email: heepistolesubmissions@gmail.com - or visit the Neokoroi website: neokoroi.org. (We have even more articles online, as well as information on the gods, photos, links and more!)

*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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THE WANING LIGHT OF AUTUMN

AN EXPLORATION INTO THE RELATIONSHIP OF APOLLON AND DEMETER

By Lykeia

When it comes to mythical references, the connections between Apollon and Demeter are very thin almost to the point of non-existent. It is somewhat unusual when you could consider some of the close seasonal associations that Apollon shares with the mythic cycle of Eleusis. We know that when Dionysos entered into the mysteries of Eleusis he was introduced as the son of Demeter, who, like her daughter, entertained a cyclic style of death and rebirth, or rather an entrance to the underworld and return. Perhaps what disassociates Apollon from this group is that in our minds for the most part we don't associate the god with actually being a part of the underworld scenario. Myths show him as a celestial god that merely departs to another space, namely Hyperborea, for a time. It could be that this is a bit too dissimilar in surface appearance to automatically add the god into the grouping. After all he doesn't die. He doesn't manifest a cycle of death and the promise of rebirth in a very obvious mythic fashion.

There is something else to consider however. There is a particularly well known charming myth about the infancy of Hermes. In this myth Hermes, kills a tortoise and from its dead remains creates the lyre. We know he then proceeds to go to the house of his brother and steal his cattle. At this point of the myth we should recognize Apollon as an originating shepherd figure. He is not yet the god of music, and likely may be a more archaic manifestation of the god keeping in line with Asiatic sun deities with which Lykeios is believed to share some commonalities of origin. Furthermore, it is Hermes' staff, which he received in trade with Apollon, that we most associate with his function as shepherd of souls. If we could stretch the imagination a little based off of this observation, it is possible that Apollon has some earlier connections with other solar cults in which the god "dies," and is born again in the dawn, such as Herodotus's description of Chem or Min, an Egyptian personification of the sun in the underworld. Regardless of any possible significance indicated from the myth of Hermes and Apollon, the god still enjoys a departure that is tied in a measure to the harvest season, and thus to Demeter.

The serpents are a symbolic link between these powerful Olympians. The chthonic snakes of Demeter are comparable to those of Apollon which can be argued to be those of both chthonic and solar origins. The fiery solar serpents are linked poetically directly to his arrows, a reference that likens his destructive powers to those of the venomous snake. By the same token the serpent is a healing and prophetic force of the god as it emerges from the hidden places of mystery and by shedding



its skin preserves a kind of immortality and vitality. It is the earth itself over which Demeter presides and links the serpent as her holy symbol, for many of the same reasons the snake is connected to Apollon in all likelihood. As the earth rejuvenates itself and gives birth to itself year after year, so does the snake rebirth itself from its flesh.

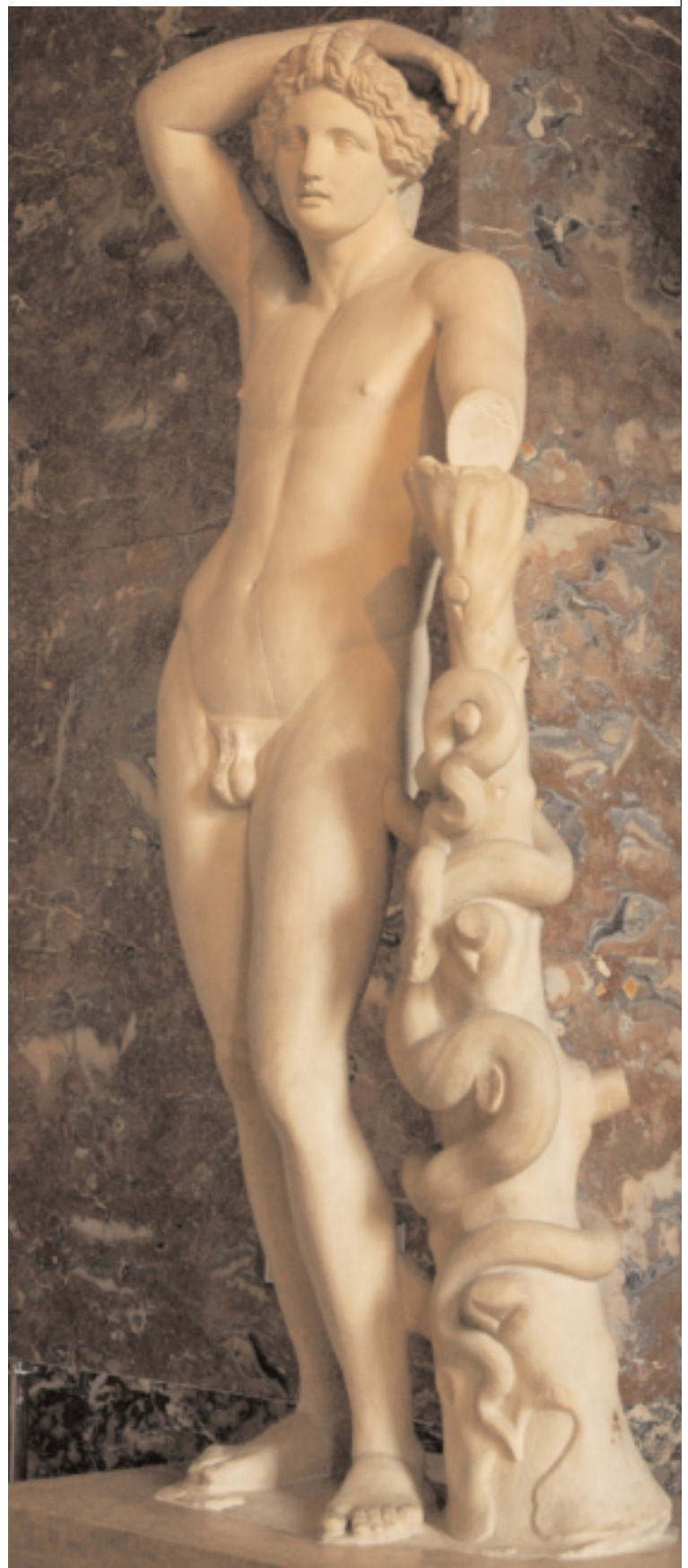
Case in point, the snake Pytho was a chthonic snake, child of Ge, and plague bringer that ravaged the countryside, before he was destroyed by Apollon. However, by that destruction he also became absorbed into the cult of the god as Pytho's flesh was united with Delphi itself as the sacred region was referred to as Pytho. It is the conjunction of the chthonic snake and the god Apollon that possibly made Delphi so successful. Though Apollon had other oracles, Delphi reigned above them all, and frequently the title Pythian was an epithet used in the place of the name of the god as a bringer of oracles as frequently as the name Loxias was used. It was here that Apollon first spoke from a subterranean room, and it was here that he sat at the center of the world. So connected was his worship with the omphalos that it appeared again as replicas in other temples of Apollon such as the one at Pompeii. Through the serpent and the omphalos Apollon is shown to possess some qualities in connection with the earth, its mysteries, and its fruitfulness.

However, the foremost solar influence visible in the myth of Demeter is not Apollon, but rather with the titan Helios, with whom he is associated and later confused. In myth it is this god who spies the abduction of Persephone and to whom Demeter entreats for news. In this respect we can see the role of the sun having importance in festival Panphoseria, where he is honored. However this may be, Apollon, though he is not literally the sun himself, is a god who rules the powers of the sun. He is the true eye of the sun and the light of the sun is his to command. Apollon wielded the sun's deadly rays in order to consume the body of Pytho, and it has been suggested that the disc that slain Hyacinthos in fact represented the sun symbolically. So, while it is Helios who is particularly important in this festival as the spiritual essence of the physical sun, it doesn't necessarily disclude Apollon either in the underlying fabric of the festival.

But that is not to say that Apollon doesn't have his own important associations with the mystic cycle of death and rebirth, though they come in more symbolic and subtle guises. Take for example the festival of Proerosia in the month of Boedromion. During this festival there are sacrifices to many gods of which Apollon is sacrificed twice. Once in a more traditional form he is given a small he-goat following the sacrifices to Poseidon and Zeus. However, following sacrifices to Demeter, Zeus Herkeios, and Hekate, to name a few, he is sacrificed to again with a young pig, an animal with direction associations to chthonic gods for whom it is offered. This suggests that there may have been an aspect of Apollon that was worshipped in chthonic associations within this particular festival.

In a more subtle fashion Apollon can be directly connected to the mysteries connected at Eleusis in the form of Euboleus, and epithet of Apollon, a personification of the cosmological plan formed by an alliance of immortals and the forces of death to show humankind its proper role. This is the visionary Apollon that is likely directly connected to the oracular Apollon. It is in a direct relation to the refractions of light delivering sight, and in this case, true spiritual sight derived from what was shown during the mysteries to the initiates. As a result of the Eleusian mysteries were that an initiate, by what he or she saw, became someone who "saw," or an epopte. It is likely that Apollon's influence was more directly tied to Dionysos within the cult than specifically to Demeter, though his sister Artemis enjoyed special recognition in Eleusis as a daughter of Artemis and Poseidon in that particular mythological set. So closely was Apollon connected to Dionysos that Aeschylus, an Eleusinian priest of some fame by his success as a playwright, described Apollon as the Iviad, the Bacchic and the Prophet.

Slightly more demonstrative in poetic work would be the invocation of Apollon in Aristophane's Thesmophoriazusae, a play of women celebration the Themophoria in honor of Demeter and her daughter. In particular his role from this prayer,



like Dionysos, seems to be more with directly related to the journey of the initiates, seemingly as an instructor and revealer in the course of the mysteries.

*"Lyre Elysian, heavenly vision,
When thy witching tones arise,
Comes the light of joy and gladness
Flashing from immortal eyes.
Eyes will glisten, ears will listen
When our manful numbers ring.
Mighty master, son of Leto,
Thine the glory, thou the King."*

Aristophanes then appears again with his mystics, this time in the underworld where they engage in their singing and dance. They make another clear reference to Apollon as a god of the initiate who has shown them the way. Thereby it could be said that the light of Apollon ripened the grain in preparation for harvest, not only literally with the sewn crops but metaphorically as he made the way for the initiates.

*"Let no one offend by his presence our ritual dances,
Whose taste is impure, nor knows the lure of the Word,
or the art that entrances;"*

Certainly we can find some points of commonality between the cults of Apollon and Demeter, particularly in some areas colonized outside of Greece. For example, in Syracuse, Sicily, there was a huge and beautiful state of Apollo Temenites that stood within proximity to the temples of Demeter and Persephone. Less concrete evidence has shown the possibility of Apollon and Demeter being worshipped conjointly in his temple in Pompeii, dating from the Hellenic period around the 6th century B.C.E. However, the biggest mythic commonality between the cults is centrally found within the festival of Hyacinthia, which does feature a dying god where it is otherwise somewhat absent from Apollon's worship.

However when comparing Persephone and Hyacinthos you get a glaring difference, and that is that Apollon's Hyacinthos isn't yearly reborn and dying. Instead he is a god who becomes identified with Apollon, through his death, to create Hyacinthos-Apollon. It is the death of the god that is the central point of the celebration. In essence the god is reborn, but he is reborn directly into association with the god, and the god's throne sits above his grave. What is particularly remarkable that connects to some degree with Demeter is that on the first day that mourns the death of Hyacinthos it is directly grain related, in that there is nothing baked and no bread eaten. This can be tied to an interesting grain-related cycle of Apollon's festivals which includes Thargelia, the festival of first fruits, and the Pyanepsia, the festival of the last grains of autumn. As grains are strictly within Demeter's province, it against connects back to her.

In reality it is the Pyanepsia that is most pertinent for the purpose of this article, for this is the last festival of the god before his retreat to Hyperborea, or to Lycia in some variations.

It occurs after the abduction of Persephone by Hades as this festival occurs in the last days of October. Here, the hero Theseus commands his men to boil altogether the last of their provisions as feast upon their homecoming. Though the significance of the heroic journey is to lengthy to fit into this article, it can still be a fine illustration that the harvest and season of prosperity has ended, and coincidentally at this time Apollon retreats his life-nurturing light away from the world. Hestia, who tends the hearths of Apollon is away with Demeter and Delphi lies in death as Dionysos sleeps in his grave.

It can thereby be argued that Apollon in his connection to Demeter represents several things that worshippers should take into consideration. 1) He is the light of the initiate, showing the path and illuminating the mind to the mystery, and therefore should be worship within the mystery rituals for Demeter and Persephone. 2) He is the light of the sun on the earth, the ruler of the physical sun who ripens the crops, and therefore is an important source within agricultural cults. 3) As such his light wanes after the harvest is complete and is reborn before the first promises of spring in preparation, and therefore he is connected to the spiritual and temporal realms as a god who turns the seasons of life and death. Such a god as this has a very important connection to Demeter, even if it is not readily apparent at the surface, and his worship should be considered some facets interlinked with hers and due honor given.

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THANKSGIVING DAY

By Allyson Szabo

I awaken to the smell of bacon
Amid my mother's protests.
I'll ruin my appetite for lunch,
She always whines.
My father waves her off,
And flips the perfect western omelet
Made just for me.

My grandmother's kitchen is filled
With smells that will remain with me
Forever.
My memory is heavily stained with
The scent and vivid crimson of paprika.

I watch, fascinated, as the bird
Comes out of the huge oven.
Its massive body heaves over
The edge of the pan.
Heavenly aromas fill the room
As I snatch pieces of dark meat
And my grandfather smiles at me.

Sitting at the table, I spear
A piece of the stuffing,
Unaware of its nutritional nature.
I can almost taste the savory flavor of it
Before putting a bite into my mouth.
We never said prayers, but
The chewing sounds were almost as good.

Flaky, papery apple strudel coated with
A white snowstorm of powdered sugar
Finds its way to my dessert plate.
I eye it with desire, trying to decide
If my bulging stomach can handle it.

It is the following morning and
I am cutting up thick, generous slices of
My grandmother's stuffing.
It is so solid that it's like a loaf of bread,
And I love to make sandwiches out of it.
I don't care who makes fun of me at school --
They don't have stuffing sandwiches,
Their loss.

I carefully look over the ingredients on my counter,
And take a deep, soul-filling breath.
Into the big metal bowl I pour bread cubes
And eggs, oh so many eggs,
Cracked one by one, their yellow eyes peeping back.
Then the liver that would have shocked me
When I was 12 and hated it.
Onions, olives, a bit of oil,
Spiced to perfection.
I mix, and stuff, and pray.

They watch as I pull the turkey out,
Four blue eyes wide with wonder at this
Golden, delicious thing.
I feel their twinned awe
As I spoon out the stuffing
Into a bowl.

Eager little mouths gobble up
My grandmother's stuffing,
Happy giggles erupting from
Greasy faces dotted with gravy.
Turkey slices disappear into tummies
Along with creamy mashed potatoes
And bright, sun-orange carrots.

Sometime in the future,
Those faces will smile on others
As I smile on them now.
They will crack the eggs
And stir up the wonder,
And serve dishes of love
To their family and friends.



SEASONAL RITUAL – LITANY FOR THE DEAD, HELLENIC

By Allyson Szabo

Preparation

Gather together all the items you will be using in the ritual. These will include the following: water, candles, matches or lighter, perfume, wine or spring water, offerings, the script, poetry or hymns, instruments, and music. You may also want to include food, barley, objects of worship such as statuettes or stones, an altar cloth or covering, etc. Items or images of the dead, and a scroll of their names should be present. The items you will use are limited only by your imagination and what you can carry.

Prior to the ritual itself, the altar should be prepared for use. It should be to one side, usually to the east but practicality is more important than direction. Have on it the candles you will be using, the goblet of wine or water, and the various things mentioned above. It may be desirable to keep some or all of the grave items under the altar, or in a basket in front of or to the side of the altar, so as not to crowd the hearth candle. Everything you need should be at hand and ready to use so that you are fully prepared.



Pomp (Procession)

The priestess will lead the worshipers to the temenos boundary, but not within. The Pomp is enacted without words, in a space of ritual silence, but drums, shakers, and other instruments can (and should) be played in a subdued manner. Those who are grieving should place themselves together in a particular spot that is comfortable to them. A secondary altar may be set up with images of the dead, and a scroll containing a list of names should be kept under or by the altar. Generally, men and women should both have their hair covered during this ritual, out of respect for those who can no longer rely on physical beauty.

Music: Lament (2nd Century CE) author unknown.

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xotPWR5I8RY>)

Khernips (Purification of the Sacred Space)

Water is usually used to purify those attending and those leading, as well as to mark out the sacred precinct. This is called khernips, and the water traditionally was pure and from a sacred spring or special source. It is kept in a special vessel, the perieranteria. At a temple, this container is kept outside the sacred precinct so that those approaching can purify themselves prior to entering the sacred space. For an indoor setting, each person can hold their hands over a receiving bowl and have the khernips poured over their hands so that water does not get spilled all over. The remaining water should then be used to sprinkle the edges of your sacred precinct and the altar. Khernips is performed without speaking, although it is not unusual for a quiet word to be shared between the priesthood and the one being cleansed. It should be kept to a minimum.

Music: Song of Seikilos (c. 100BCE) from An Ancient Lyre

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_94QbWV440)

Ritual Lighting of Sacred Fire

Originally this flame was taken from the Public Hearth of the Polis, sacred to Hestia. For those who have an altar to Hestia in their homes, it would be appropriate to light the ritual flame from that flame, and then carry it during the Pomp to light the candle or bonfire for your ritual. Some people like to use a candle or an oil lamp. The Sacred Fire should be a large candle centered on the altar.

Tossing of Barley

A special ritual basket called a kanoun is brought to the sacred precinct or altar by one of the participants, and is filled with barley or buckwheat groats. This barley is used to scatter around the ritual space, including the altar, in order to further purify it and show that it is sacred space dedicated to the gods. Indoors, the groats may be sprinkled carefully on the altar and in a receiving bowl at the edges of the space.

Preliminary Invocation

The priestess should stand before the altar, facing the participants. She should hold a cup or horn of spring water or watered wine in one or both hands.

Music: Threnos (c. 700BCE) by Simonides

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfvP4bB2LKc>)

Priestess: O Deathless Ones,
Gods of Starry Heaven,
Broad Earth,
And the Great Below,
Xairete, Thanatoi!
Hear, and attend.
Bless us with your presence,
Help us as we honor those who have passed.

Spondai (Libations)

The first libation is to Hestia as it is traditional to offer Hestia the first and last portion of any offering. There is question as to whether this is truly something that the ancient Greeks did, but it has entered into the modern ritual very firmly.

Priestess: Receive these libations, Hestia,
Goddess of the Hearth,
Keeper of the Sacred Flame,
Guardian of the Home.
For you we pour out the first portion,
as yours is the first and the last.
Join us in our grief and mourning and remembering.
(pour a portion of wine or other liquid offering into the libation bowl)
Be well disposed.

Priest: For the gods of the dead, of the world below,
We pour out the next shares,
For it is under your auspices we gather tonight.

For Hecate, saffron robed dark one,
Who guides the souls of our departed
(pour libation)
Be well disposed.



Priestess: For Persephone, Queen of the World Below,
Pale goddess with bright coifs
Who brought compassion to Death,
(*pour libation*)
Be well disposed.

For Hades, Dark Lord,
King of the realm of Death,
You of sable robes and earthly jewels,
(*pour libation*)
Be well disposed.

Priest: For Hermes Kthonos,
Guide of those who move
Between the life and death,
(*pour libation*)
Be well disposed.

And for all the dark, moist,
Frightening, misunderstood gods
Of death and time,
I pour now
An equal measure
Of sweet wine/water.
(*pour libation*)
Be well disposed.



Litany For the Dead

The priestess shall turn to face the altar and retrieve the list of names. These shall be read aloud, and a single bell rung after each name.

The priest then invites people to come up one at a time and light a candle from the Sacred Fire. As they light it, they speak the name of those they wish to honor. The candle is placed on the altar, the bell is rung, and they return to their place. This is done in silence.

Music: *Nocturnal Hecate by Daemonia Nympha (softly).*

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m02dQFcxIA0>)

Priest: Dear departed ones, you have taken your seat in the halls of Queen Persephone and her lord, among all those who have also left this mortal realm. May you have a place of honor there! May you enjoy hospitality and ease!

Now hear us, beloved ones. Know that we have not let your memory fade, nor will we ever neglect this duty! May our offerings strengthen you and bring you gladness, as you brought strength and gladness to our lives. Do not forget those of us who still walk under the sun, beloved ones, and lend us your wisdom still.

Fleet-footed Hermes, carry these words to Haides and bring us each an omen as befits us.

All shall be asked to sit quietly. It is appropriate for shawls to be pulled over heads, and eyes to be closed. The priestess should

wait approximately 3 to 4 minutes before gently rousing people. They should be given a moment to focus.

Priestess: O Hermes, guide of souls, protector of the flocks, go out into the dark and attend to the ones who are lost! Take them by the hand and lead them safely out of this world and into the next. Keep them on the right road to Haides and make their journey swift and easy.

O Haides, master of his dark land, lord of the necropolis, open the way for our honored dead, so that nothing opposes them in this journey. Allow them to reach your home, their new home, in safety.

Priest: O Hecate, mistress of three ways, mighty one who walks between the worlds and knows all that lies within them, light the way for our dead, and reveal to them all of the secrets that they will need to know to complete this journey. Speak the names of the guardians at the gates, so that they will let our beloved ones pass by.

O Persephone, beautiful queen of those beneath the earth, merciful and terrible one, all of the gods and daimones¹ and ancestral spirits obey your every word without fail, so take pity on these our dead, and speak persuasive words on their behalf to your stern husband, the unseen one who receives many guests.

Priestess: Do any of you have gifts to offer, on behalf of our beloved dead?

Those grieving will come forward and offer the appropriate gifts and speak the following (these may be added to in the form of poetry, song, etc. or taken out if they will not be used):

Mourner: I give you coins to pay the Ferryman, that he might allow you to cross over the Styx.
Place two coins into the offering bowl.

Mourner: I give you candles to light your way, and so that you may see all the wonderful things that await you in Haides' realm.
Light the candles and set them on the altar or by the offering bowl.

Mourner: I give you perfume/incense that you might enjoy all of the sensual pleasures of the Underworld.
Pour out or place the perfume in the offering bowl.

Mourner: I give you food, so that you shall not hunger in the darkness.
Set the food in the offering bowl.

Mourner: I give you cool water to drink, that you might never thirst in the darkness.
Pour the libation of water or wine into the offering bowl.

Mourner: I give you milk that you might be renewed like a child at the breast.
Pour the libation of milk into the offering bowl.

Mourner: I give you the virgin oil to anoint yourself with at the festivals of Haides.
Pour the libation of olive oil into the offering bowl.

Mourner: I give you wine that you might know joy and life in death.
Pour the wine into the offering bowl.

Mourner: I give you these beautiful things so that you will be admired for your possessions in the dark realms.
Place the remainder of the offerings into the bowl.

The priestess places the last items into the offering bowl and sets it below the altar carefully.

Priestess: Our beloved dead have been mourned tonight. They have been honored by our words and our gifts, and by our attentions. May their names be spoken each year at the appropriate times, never to be forgotten or ignored. May they remember us kindly when it comes our time to appear before the Black Judges in the Underworld, and speak mercifully for us!

Women shall wail and men shall drum or use other instruments, and a cacophony is made.

Music: *Akousate (from an Hellenistic era fragment)*

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h315HnKWqH4>)

Final Libations / Last Libation for Hestia

Priest: O Thanatoi, we offer thanks to you.
(pour libation to all the gods into libation bowl)

And for Hestia, as yours is always the first and last.
(pour libation to Hestia into libation bowl)

NOTES: The funerary portion of the ritual is based upon Sannion's Greco-Egyptian ritual designed for a young girl who passed away several years ago. The rest of the ritual is based upon the basic Noumenia ritual used by the members of Neokoroi. It is my intent to perform this ritual on October 30th, at a Halloween gathering of like-minded individuals (most of whom are not Hellenic but are sympathetic to pagan beliefs). Because this is a modern ritual without ancient basis, other people may choose to celebrate it at different times of the year. Anthesteria comes to mind, as well as Thesmophoria.

[1] Daimones is pronounced *day – moan – aye*.



MIASMA AND MOURNING

By Suzanne Thackston

Much has been written on the subject of miasma in ancient Greece and the definitions, rituals and taboos surrounding it. It is the cause of much speculation and debate among modern practitioners of Hellenismos. The modern dictionary defines miasma as a noxious vapor that can cause contagion, or a corrupting, dangerous or deathlike influence, among others. The closest translation we have of the word from ancient Greece is 'pollution' or 'stain.' There are many different causes of miasma, such as blood guilt, madness, sex, birth, death and illness, all of which have their own rules, questions and arguments surrounding them. Most worshipers will encounter a few occasions in their lives in which miasma or the possibility of miasma will affect them. One of the most prevalent is mourning.

Because our society does not have prescribed definitions and customs outlining the miasma of mourning, the modern Hellenists will need to work out, individually, how to identify and handle it. The archaic notion that miasmatic issues mean one is polluted, unclean or unfit for society or the company of the gods, is difficult to integrate entirely with modern mores and attitudes. Reconstructionists are well advised to begin with source material and research based on known Hellenic customs, but we are not required to remain rooted there. A gentler, more empathetic, attitude toward the issue of miasma can be incorporated into authentic reconstruction practice.

Grieving is an individual experience, varying not only between people but between events. Therefore miasma can look and feel very differently from what tradition dictates and what anyone might expect. The stages of grief can be a useful tool in determining whether or not one is miasmatic, and what to do about it. For example, during the anger phase one might rail at the gods or decline to make a scheduled offering, while during the depression phase one might simply neglect tending shrines or participating in regular worship activities. One can look upon miasma as something inflicted upon us by the grief, something from which we must cleanse ourselves in order to return to the good auspices of our theoi, or as a state of grace in which we are free to express our grief as our individual circumstances dictate.

In much the same way as modern women have come to recognize the old 'red tent' taboo as a respite rather than an alienation period, so can we modern Hellenists view a period of miasma as a grace period, an opportunity to be released from the normal obligations and attitudes of a worshiper even as we seek solace in the company of our gods and use the opportunity to learn and grow ever closer to Them in service.

Traditionally when a household was in mourning it was customary to cover the shrines and refrain from attending the temple. This causes consternation among worshipers who feel that during times of terrible grief and mourning they should not be cut off from their gods, but need them more than ever. Our gods do not abandon us in times of trial and misery. The veiling of the shrines allows us to move through our pain without incurring any guilt or shame from being in the presence of our representations of our beloved gods and not feeling the usual sense of uplifting connection. It frees us to be furious or sad, keening or silent, to pray or to abstain, all in the knowledge that the gods are with us and understand our grief. It is a visible acknowledgment that this time period is 'other', and this allows the unveiling to be an act of stepping back into our roles as neokoroi and hands of the gods. It is not a demonstration of separation and disgust, but of love and compassion.

The taint of miasma is less a stigma than a courtesy. In the presence of someone who is grieving terribly most people feel empathy and are touched by the strong emotions of the bereaved. Refraining from participation in festivals or temple duties is a courtesy, not only freeing the bereaved from ordinary tasks, but allowing those who are not miasmatic to continue the necessary work of offering timai to the gods without the distraction of the miasmatic energy. This way the bereaved can grieve without guilt, and their family members and community can take care of business efficiently and then return to comfort the sorrowing one with full attention. In this fashion the relationship between mortals and the gods is not interrupted, and the bereaved still basks in the eternal regard, love and compassion of the theoi.

Grief does not have a static start and ending point, and the recommencement of normal worship activities does not mean that all mourning has ceased. But it does indicate that the bereaved is moving through the process and is ready to take back the responsibilities and customs of regular life, including worship. The cleansing of one's person, hearth, shrines and household can all be accomplished in a variety of traditional fashions including spring or sea water, bathing, fire, winnowing fans, grain scattering, fumigation and many more. The cause of the miasma as well as personal preference and practice will dictate the specifics. But the reintegration into society can well be viewed as the mourner rediscovering her joy, even if it is sporadic, in the service of the gods, rather than being allowed back into their presence. Those who love and serve the Undying Ones are never out of their divine view.

THE AFFAIRS OF APOLLO

By Amanda Sioux Blake

Sing O Muse, of the failed love affairs of Apollo, the shining God. Passionate Apollo was much loved, by men and women alike. But the tales of His greatest loves ended in sadness, as many tales of the loves of the Immortal Gods do.

O Muses who dwell on Helikon, tell us first the tale of rich-haired Daphne, beautiful nymph. One beautiful sunny day, the Apollo was wandering in the shepherd's fields, in His days as a more agrarian God. He spotted a beautiful nymph and He instantly desired her. Now this nymph, who was called Daphne, was by nature a shy creature. She was an admirer of Artemis, and so pledged to remain chaste all her days.

When Apollo approached her with lust in His eyes, Daphne knew what He was after. She turned and ran, racing across the countryside. She was only more comely with her face flushed and her long hair blowing about her face. Apollo followed after her, calling for her to stop, saying He was no mere shepherd and He had no evil intentions towards her.

She ran faster, her delicate feet pounding into the dirt. She prayed to her father that she might somehow escape Apollo's attentions. When her feet hit the bank of the river, they stuck to the ground and shot deep roots in the fruitful earth. Her soft and pliant skin became hard bark, Her hair became leaves, and her arms branches. She had been transformed into the first laurel tree.

Apollo still loved Daphne, even in tree shape. Beauty alone was unchanged. He declared "Since you cannot be my wife, you will be my tree. My hair, my lyre, my quiver will always bear you, O laurel, as adornment ... And as my head is always young with uncut locks, may you always keep the beauty of your leaves everlasting green."

Ever after the laurel has been the most sacred tree of Apollo. The winners of athletic or musical contests are crowned with a wreath of its leaves, and Apollo's most holy priestess, the Pythia, chewed its leaves to bring about her oracular trance.

Next, O rich-haired Muses Nine, sing of the sad tale of Cyparissus, whom Apollo loved with all His divine heart. Young Cyparissus had no interest in the gifts of Aphrodite, but only wished to spend his days caring for his beloved pet stag. He was not the least bit interested in the occupations of young men, not in hunting, not in young girls, or philosophy. He even ignored far-shooting Apollo's attentions.

On one ill-fated day, Cyparissus accidentally stabbed his beloved pet with a javelin. The poor boy was heartbroken and overcome with grief. He cried to Apollo "If you love me, grant that I may mourn my stag forever." The God granted his strange request, turning him into the cypress tree, ever after regarded as the tree of mourning, saying "I shall mourn for you, for others you shall mourn; you [the cypress tree] shall attend when men with grief are torn."

Lastly, sweet Muses, sing of Hyacinthus, a fine youth of Sparta. An exceptional youth he was, skilled in hunting, music and athletics. A lover of Apollo he was. But Zephyros, the God of West Wind, had also fallen in love with him. Hyacinthus chose Apollo, paying no attention to the West Wind. Zephyros was hurt, angry, and consumed with jealousy. One balmy summer day, while Apollo and Hyacinthus were playing a game of discus, the wind ripped the discus out of the God's hand and directed it at Hyacinthus. The boy was stuck hard in the head,



a fatal wound. Apollo ran to His love, blaming Himself for not being more careful with the fragile human. Apollo tried to heal Hyacinthus, but it was too late. He was dead. Shining Phoebos could do nothing but hold the body of His mortal lover and weep great tears of pain. Where the blood of Hyacinthus had spilled upon the ground, a beautifully flower sprung up. The hyacinth blooms in the spring, and the petals quickly wither and die, a symbol of youth cut tragically short. Some of the poets claim that Apollo also took Hyacinthus's soul to Olympus to remain His companion, even in death, but I do not know if that part of the tale is truthful.

O shining Apollo, unlucky in love, I will remember You in another song.

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THE BRIDE

By Lykeia

There are many different expressions of love that we mortals feel for our gods, but none is perhaps the most controversial as the love associated with bridal mysticism. That is to say, where one sustains a devoted love for a particular god as one would for a spouse. To some this may be a foreign concept, perhaps tinged with hubris, but it is very real spiritual experience for those worshippers who have this relationship and is likely not all that uncommon. In fact when you think of it this is a very natural progression of one's journey to find a space of union with their god, which has little to nothing to do with sexual desire. Certainly Plutarch scoffed at the idea that the gods were motivated by sex. He upheld that the gods dwelled for some time with those that they loved. The gods, after all, are not biological animals like humans are and would be unlikely to pursue a mortal for sexual gratification. Instead, the gods succumb to the power of Aphrodite, to the power of love, the prelude of marriage according to her role. This love is not restricted to gender roles or biological rules, since it is beyond biology and is entirely a matter of the soul. That said forms of union and close proximity with the god in question can be interpreted in the human experience as being one of intense pleasure, or even discomfort.

The experience of love in itself is not one connected altogether with sex and baser instincts. In certain time periods such physical expressions frequently went unfulfilled in chivalrous love and poetic love. Instead it is an expression of something that we feel deeper from within us that connect us to the focus of our love whether it is a god or man. Such basis of love has been associated to the ideas of soul mates among humans, and the ideal of true love. If love is the greatest gift of our souls, it is natural then that love is expansive, and is a thing that is as much part of the gods as it is a part of us. Zeus loved Ganymede and Leda and numerous others; Apollon had his Kyrene and Hyacinthos and even more to nearly put him on par with his father, and Aphrodite had her string of loves including Adonis, and Ankhises. All of the gods were known to have a large number of lovers and offspring among mortals which is quite evident from a reading of the Iliad in which Hera chastises Zeus for showing favor to his son and desiring to save him from death when many other gods had sons they too were losing on the battle field. With the exception of Aphrodite, most goddesses loved mortals in a mythically chaste fashion that did not produce offspring. Artemis loved Hippolytus, and Athena jealously defended her chosen.

Therefore, we cannot interpret relationships of love as only those myths that produce a mythic sexual union. However, those that do incorporate a sexual element do have a powerful

symbolic element that cannot be denied. A symbol of utter and complete spiritual union, typically limited to the male gods that are penetrative forces by virtue of their masculine nature. Also, as we know from the tale of Psyche and the associations of the soul and wedded wives as resembling nymphai, the mortal soul, regardless of biological life, is believed to be feminine and receptive to penetration of the gods. She is brought into union with Eros, though it is not without its trials and difficulties. In this fashion the soul goes through a journey constructed by a deity associated with the god that loves the mortal, as Aphrodite played the part between Psyche and Eros. She is married to Eros, the love has been consummated, but she is journeying through her mortal life before she can truly join with love. It is therefore with the masculine god and the receptive feminine soul, regardless of whether it is in a male or female body, that is often depicted in almost a graphic nature in ancient art, whether the god is wearing a human form or that of an animal.

Now what would be the manifestation in result of a moment of union with the divine lover? Likely it would vary largely dependent on the god in question. Historically possession, the most visible form of union, was a common result with Dionysos and Apollon particularly. The maenads of Dionysos would acquire uncommon strength when they were thus enraptured, even as Apollon's oracles and sibyls would spill their prophecies, and great poets would sing. For a moment some small quality of the god would merge within his love. The reaction upon the mortal could almost be described as an intense pleasure as per the natural biological response connected with unification, or pain. The most important thing though is that leaves the "bride" with a reaffirmed feeling of love and connection with the god as the bond strengthens.



Why then is this beneficial to the soul? It is beneficial because it stimulates growth of the soul and aids in its transformation. Plutarch outlined the transition from mortal, which gives way to the hero, which will become the demi-god, and finally a god. It can initially play out on a more subtle level as it was represented by initiation into the mysteries of Dionysos. By undergoing initiation the initiate became in essence the bride of the god, giving her a rebirth into a new spiritual existence, just as the human soul mythically was produced from the remaining fragments of Zagreus, the first Dionysos. It is through the initial union with Dionysos by initiation that would deliver a kind of rebirth for the soul's progress. So what can we see then in myths that represent this birth resulting in the union between god and mortal? There is, quite literally, a birth. For example, the union between Zeus and Leda yielded the Discouri and Helen; Semele bore Dionysos; and Apollon fathered Asklepios.

This creates in an interesting way to read the story of Cassandra of Troy, cursed with giving oracles but no one believing her. According to myth this resulted in an agreement between the girl and Apollon that he would give her the gift of the oracle, something accomplished by his union with her, if she agreed to give him children. Cassandra betrayed him and refused to have children with him. The implications of the myth would be that she refused the love of the god. She desired the result of union with the god in that she would be blessed with oracles, but didn't love the god or desire the full ramifications that went along with this relationship. In result she continues to be fertilized by the union with Apollon but is unable to bear fruit of that union into the real world, for this reason her oracles were received in disbelief. The fully formed oracles that would have been actually heard by receivers would have been the fruit of that union active during her lifetime before her transformation after death. This transformation is indicated within the Oresteia when Clytemnestra refers to the last words of Cassandra as her swan song, or the death song she sang before she, as a Hyperborean swan, departed our world.

To further illustrate along this vein we have the myth of Kyrene. Apollon fell in love with her and after her triumph over the lion he married her and took her to Lycia where she gave birth to their son, a god of honeybees and shepherds. This bears some similarity to the kidnapping of Ganymede where the boy was removed completely from his previous experience to dwell with the god. In the case of Kyrene, her city is her marital bower and a place favored by Apollon because of his wife living there. This is in apparent direct contrast to death myths of lovers of the gods such as that of Hyakinthos. In such a case the lover is killed by his love or a deity associated with his love and is thereafter deified, such as in the case too of Adonis who becomes divine after being slain by Ares, or the death of Hippolytus the charioteer among a great many examples. The god, or associated deity, kills his love, and through that death the lover is transformed, symbolized by the flowers that sprung from his blood. In the case of Hyakinthos, whom scholars believe to have been a local god of the Peloponnese

before the coming of the Doric people, he achieved ultimate union with Apollon and his festival Hyacinthia celebrates him as Hyacinthos-Apollon. The throne of Apollon in Sparta literally rested over the grave of Hyacinthos as part one and the same.

But philosophical theory, and mythic representation aside, the love between mortals and gods is still a very real thing in today's world. It is not the result of delusion or fantasy, but rather an existence of living within and acknowledging a higher level of love. This is the noblest gift of Aphrodite, who was first to greet Apollon's bride Kyrene. However, just as myths vary with different expressions of love between mortals and gods, so it is the same in reality. There may be those who share very similar relationships in many ways while differing in others. And it

doesn't necessarily disclude mortal love, which is an entirely different emotional bond, brief and sweet compared to the relationship with the god. We do not have to choose so long as we continue to cherish our love as a vital part of our lives. There are those, however, who do choose to devote their love exclusively to their god. Sometimes this changes over time if the gods give us someone to share this brief expanse of mortal time with. Sometimes it doesn't change. For everyone it is different. In the end it is our capacity to love that brings us closer to the gods.

Plutarch, *Lives*: 51

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APHRODITE AND THE GAY AND TRANSGENDERED

by Amanda Sioux Blake

Excerpt from the forthcoming title *"Journey to Olympus: A Modern Spiritual Odyssey"*

At first glance, Aphrodite may seem to be, simply, a straight Goddess. While it is true that her own attraction is primarily reserved for men, through her children, she is connected to, and affirms, homosexual attraction and GLBT experiences. Eros, her son by Ares, had affairs with men as well as women. So did nearly all the Olympian gods, Ares and Hades being the only ones who never took a male lover. Actually, in those days, there was no concept of sexual orientation. You were just attracted to beautiful people, and yes some people liked one gender better than the other, but it was considered no different then liking a certain kind of food better than another.

The next myth is an interesting way to explain the existence of hermaphrodites and transgender individuals. This myth may be seen as merely entertaining, but the fact that it exists shows an acceptance of such unique people that might shock and surprise some.

Aphrodite once had an affair with Hermes, and bore him a son, whose name is a combination of this parents' names: Hermaphroditos. He was a very handsome young God, but he did not take after his mother. He was very shy, and was uninterested in taking a lover. He preferred to spend his days traveling and hunting in the woods. One day, hot and thirsty from his wanderings, he stopped at a pool to refresh himself. The nymph of the pool, Salmakis, gazed up at him and instantly fell in love with him. She jumped up and immediately declared her undying love for the extremely startled boy, and asked him to marry her, or if he was already married to take her as his mistress.

Poor Hermaphroditos was completely blindsided! He wasn't interested in marriage at all, and he certainly wasn't about to marry this strange nymph who he had just barely met. He told her as much, but Salmakis was not about to take no for an answer. She threw her arms around him and prayed loudly that they would never be separated. Some unknown God answered her prayer. But it didn't work out quite as she wanted. Their bodies fused, and they became neither male nor female, but the first hermaphrodite, possessing both the physical aspects and the souls of both genders.

The poor boy was shocked at what he had become, so he prayed to his parents. S/he didn't want to be the only such person in the world, so Aphrodite cursed the pool of Salmakis, making the same thing happen to anyone who bathed in it. She also gave him wings, and an honored place in the ranks of the Erotes...

Keep watching for the release of *"Journey to Olympus: A Modern Spiritual Odyssey"* to read more!



Photo by User Al Mare, Wikipedia Commons

FLAVORS OF THE SEASON

By Allyson Szabo

Hearty Stew

(serves 10)

With the weather getting colder and rain coming more frequently, my thoughts always turn to soups and stews. Stew in particular is warming and soothing, and easy to make. Since you can make variations simply by changing one ingredient (lamb instead of beef, for instance), it's a great staple to have on hand. The following stew recipe is one I used this week, and my family ate it with great gusto. It can have all sorts of deliciousness thrown into it, such as local turnips, fresh squash of any variety, or even tomatoes if you so choose. This is a great way to get vegetables (especially unfamiliar ones) into fussy eaters.

For me, stew is one of the quintessential foods for making offerings to my gods. I'm not sure why; perhaps it's just been around so long that it is historically correct for any age. I like the idea of mingling the flavors of the stew, much in the same way that my heart is mingled with the offerings I later make to the ones I worship. From a practical point of view, a stew would have been the way to feed multitudes at a public festival, and so I feel a connection with those who lived long ago and served similar simple, tasty meals to their friends, family, and other worshippers.

Ingredients

4-5 lbs of beef, cubed
6 large carrots, coined
2-3 large onions, diced
10 cloves garlic, minced or sliced
4 lbs potatoes, diced (or baby potatoes halved)
2 cups corn kernels, fresh or frozen
2 cups peas, fresh or frozen
other fresh or frozen vegetables as desired
1-2 cup dried lentils, rice, split peas, or barley
2+ pints broth
herbs, salt, and pepper to taste

Method:

In a large stew pot, use two tablespoons of olive oil, butter or broth, and sautee the onions in it. When the onions are beginning to be soft, add the garlic (if you put it in too early it will tend to sear a bit, which changes the flavor). When the onions are soft and clear, add in the beef and sautee until it is well browned on all sides (about three minutes). Add enough broth to cover the meat and bring to a boil.

Meanwhile, ready your vegetables. Begin with the potatoes, then add each of the other vegetables you wish to have in the stew. As you add things, keep adding broth to make certain everything is under the liquid. The key to good stew is a proper wet cooking environment which means not letting things dry out, stick, or pop out of the liquid at the top! Last, add your dried lentils (or whatever other legume or grain you choose to add). Stir well, and then taste for flavor.

Add in whatever herbs and condiments you feel are necessary. Sea salt or kosher salt tends to add a very nice flavor, and allows you to add a salty punch without adding too much sodium. Pepper improves most stews and soups, but don't add too much. Other suggestions include fresh or dried parsley, sage, savory, thyme, oregano, and cilantro. Remember that fresh herbs add a slightly different flavor than dried ones, so you'll want to check your flavor often. Another suggestion for those who like spicy things is to add a few drops of your favorite hot sauce to simmer in with everything else!

If you find that your stew is ready but is not thick enough, you have a variety of options for thickening. The easiest cheat is to add a packet of dried gravy mix. If you want to be a bit more authentic, make a roux of flour and butter, and add that a bit at a time to your stew, stirring vigorously, until it reaches the consistency you prefer.

Serve up your stew with a loaf of fresh soda bread and a generous helping of home-made butter!





Fresh Soda Bread, with Variations

(one loaf)

Soda bread is a staple in my house. You can make it in an hour, and the different ways you can combine it with other ingredients really makes it a flexible addition to any meal. Try making soda bread with something other than white, all-purpose flour; spelt, for instance, or a whole grain brown flour. You can make this yummy loaf be healthy and full of fiber as well as delicious.

For me, bread is one of my staple offerings to the gods. I prefer it to all other things, and often bake it up with nuts or barley groats in it to combine favored ingredients. Because of its heartiness and portability, bread is a wonderful addition to most rituals.

Ingredients (basic recipe):

- 1 12oz can of soda water
- 3 cups flour
- 3 tbsp baking powder
- 1 tbsp salt
- 3 tbsp sugar or substitute

Method:

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Mix the dry ingredients together in a large mixing bowl. Make a small well in the center and pour in the entire can of soda water. It will froth – don't panic, that's good! Mix thoroughly to create a slightly wet but firm batter. Prepare a metal or silicone bread pan by spraying with a no-stick spray such as Pam, and pour in the batter. Smooth out to the corners of the bread pan, then use a very sharp knife to cut a slice down the center. When the oven is fully pre-heated (this is important – do NOT add the bread until your oven is up to temperature!), put the loaf in for one hour.

Allow the loaf to cool somewhat before cutting. Soda bread doesn't slice well when warm, but it's also so tasty that people won't want to wait for it to cool. I frequently make a “sacrificial” loaf which I dole out in small chunks to bystanders.

Variations on the theme:

When you are mixing your ingredients together, you have many options available. Soda bread, by nature, is somewhat cake-like in texture, unlike yeast breads. It's also more forgiving if you make a mistake, and sometimes mistakes can turn out deliciously!

If you wish to create a savory loaf of bread, you can add fresh chopped onion, garlic, or herbs to the batter and mix them in well. You can also add dried herbs, flaked onion or garlic, and even things like sun-dried tomatoes or olive slices. Bake as the recipe calls for (though if there are wet ingredients like olives, check for doneness before you take it out of the oven), and you'll end up with a delicious treat!

For those of us with sweet tooths, there are tons of options! I like to add a bit of extra flour, perhaps a tablespoon or two, to make the dough a little stiffer. I then roll it out so that it is the width of a loaf pan, but long and flat. Then I sprinkle sweet things onto the dough: honey, cinnamon, sugar, stevia, etc. Then you roll the dough up into a loaf shape and drop it into the pan, and bake as above. You can also add a layer of very thinly sliced fruit before rolling up, for something extra special (but beware, it might take a bit longer to bake).

Sweet or savory, serve these with fresh butter or marmalade and you will be favored by your family!

Fresh Butter

Who doesn't enjoy a bit of fresh, tasty butter on their bread or mashed potatoes? In our house, Thanksgiving is a time when we showcase our home-made breads, jams and jellies, relishes... and we make butter with the kids. This is a fun, easy thing to do, and the results are pleasing both to the eye and the palate!

On top of all that, it's a lovely thing to put on your fresh bread as a part of your offering to the gods. When we make things with our hands, and imbue those things with our own efforts, our own love and devotion, we make them holy and special. To create a meal designed to serve at a theoxenia, to the gods themselves, is in itself an offering.

Ingredients:

- heavy cream (whipping cream may be used but won't result in as tasty a product)
- salt to taste



Method:

For the kids, pour some of the cream into a heavy glass jar, such as a quart size canning jar. Add an agitator (we use plastic marbles sanitized for the purpose – glass marbles can fracture the glass jar!) and put on some good, bouncy music. Hand the jar to the kids and make them dance for about 15 minutes. The jar must be shaken until almost all the liquid is gone and all that remains are lumps of butter with a bit of buttermilk at the bottom.

For the adults, save yourself some problems and use a MixMaster or other electric mixing device. Some people cover the entire thing in plastic wrap to avoid splatter, but I've always had luck with being careful and ramping up the mixing speed slowly. Use the whisk attachment if you have one. Stir until you form the butter chunks. It should be very obvious which parts are butter. The buttermilk can be saved for use in coffee, or you can make a really delicious cornbread with it.

Your butter product needs to be emptied into a strainer or cheesecloth, then squeezed repeatedly to get out as much liquid as possible. Pioneer women had special bowls that allowed them to do the squeezing with a wooden paddle, and a lip that let them pour out the buttermilk as it accumulated. This part is

messy, and kids love doing it but often run out of steam long before enough of the buttermilk has come out. Remember that the more buttermilk still in your butter, the faster it will go rancid. A pat of butter with all or the vast majority of the liquid removed will last for weeks in your fridge.

Once the butter has been squished and squeezed until no more liquid comes off, rinse it in cold water. Keep rinsing until the water runs clear underneath it. Then sprinkle a little salt over your butter and mix in thoroughly by hand.

At this point you can do many fun things. Butter can be molded just like play dough, if you have someone in your home who is artistic. It can be pressed into a mold or rolled out flat and cut with a cookie cutter. If it's for eating more than for show, make a log out of it and wrap it in plastic wrap to keep it fresh. Old fashioned butter molds can often be picked up cheap at garage and tag sales, because people have no idea what they are!

Your butter will be a crowning display (and ingredient!) on your Thanksgiving or Festal table. The added benefit is that you'll know exactly what you're eating.



THE APHRODISIA

As written by Laurelei Black, Exegete of Aphrodite for Neokoroi

Adapted from Cult of Aphrodite by Laurelei Black, Asteria Books 2010

Background

Though Classical sources admit to there having been Aphrodisia rituals in several locales in Greece, only scant information exists about two – the Aphrodisia that were held on Cyprus and in Athens. The Kyprian festival, though, is the more detailed, historically.

This Aphrodisia is known as a bathing festival, wherein Aphrodite goes to Her bath at Paphos. This is a source of regeneration and cleansing for Her, as it is the site where She first came upon the land, according to many of Her birth myths.

Peitho (Persuasion), whom Sappho and Aeschylus list as Aphrodite's daughter, is also honored during this festival. The icons of both Goddesses are taken in procession from New Paphos to Old Paphos in order to be bathed and adorned.

Classical writers say that this ritual included “instructions in the Mysteries of Aphrodite” and that the participants are given a measure of salt and a phallus. No specific description of the “instructions in the Mysteries” are provided, though some scholars note that these were bawdy proceedings.

The Athenian Aphrodisia was the first festival of the calendar year, taking place on the 4th day of the new lunar month following the Summer Solstice.

Materials

- Liknon basket
- Candle (any color) & holder or torch
- Bowl of water
- Incense & holder
- Lighter/matches
- Salt
- Barley
- Hestia lamp/candle
- Aphrodite statue
- Peitho statue
- Rose oil
- Necklaces
- Garlands and wreaths
- Fresh cloth
- Sea salt in small bags
- Phallus cakes
- Wine
- Libation bowl
- Feast food

Preparation

You should have two icons of whatever size you like. The Aphrodite icon used in this rite should be the one your local cult primarily uses in ritual. The Peitho icon can be the same size or smaller. Any female figure will suffice for Peitho.

Purchase pieces of fabric for each of the statues and cut them to an appropriate length and width so that they can be used as himations. Also, make or buy necklaces, garlands and wreaths to adorn the statues.

Pour a measure of salt into small organza, felt or leather bags so that each participant may receive one.

Bake phallus cakes using the penis-shaped cupcake pans available at adult novelty stores. You can also shape bread dough into penis shapes and give these to each celebrant.

This rite will take place at a “washing place” of your choosing. This may be the same body of water that you used in the Anagogia-Katagogia cycle, your backyard swimming pool or a bird bath that your group has designated “Aphrodite’s Bath.”

The Rite

The pompe for this rite should be upbeat and filled with frivolity. You can sing a chant like this one:

*Aphrodite, Queen of Heaven,
Aphrodite, Queen of Earth,
Aphrodite, bring us pleasure.
Aphrodite bring us mirth.*

or

*Enter grace,
enter beauty,
enter the heart into ecstasy.*



or

Acidalia, dea orea.

Within the pompe, there should be a fire-bearer, waterbearer, grain-bearer and basket-bearer and two iconbearers. These six functionaries should lead the participants on a walk that is longer than usual, to bring to mind the distance between the new city and the old. They will circle the space one time where the participants will stand and then place their items on the altar or on the ground near the washing place.

The Hiereia steps forward and says, “You are preparing to enter the Rites of the Aphrodisia. This is a mystery ritual, and as a participant in it, you will be initiated into these Mysteries of Aphrodite. Everything that you experience and witness here is sacred. Mystery is not understood by those who have not experienced it, and the price paid for breaking the vow of silence is a high one. The price will not be extracted by anyone here, but by Aphrodite herself. Never break a women’s confidence. Her wrath can destroy as completely as her love can heal. Will you honor the silence of the Mystery?”

All participants answer for themselves.

Hiereia says, “Then quiet your mouth and prepare to enter the Aphrodisia.”

Prepare the khernips and then sprinkle the space after each person has rinsed his hands in the water.

Each participant throws a handful of barley onto the altar.

Light the Hestia lamp/candle.

A speaker steps forward and says, “Lovely Aphrodite! You and your handmaiden, Peitho, come once again to Your bath, where You find both succor and regeneration. Here, we strip away the hurts and dirt and clothe You in the beauty that befits You.”

Each person comes forward to bathe the icons and anoint them with rose oil.

Place the himations and other adornments on both icons.

Instructions in the Mysteries

The following section is just one idea that can be presented as The Mysteries of Aphrodite. Each local cult in ancient Greece had their own Mysteries, and modern practice can and should follow suit. Use these Mysteries if you like, but feel encouraged to develop your own section of ritual to use here.

The Hiereia speaks: “Perhaps you have never heard the story of Aphrodite and the Golden Apple. ”

“It happened when all the Gods of Olympos were gathered to celebrate the wedding of Peleus and Thetis. One had been neglected. This one was Strife, and She would have Her presence felt.”

“So She took a golden apple and inscribed it with the words ‘For the Fairest.’ Three Goddesses, all having a valid claim, vied for the trophy. To avoid heartache, Zeus appointed Paris of Troy to decide who would win it.”

“Each Goddess offered a bribe. Hera, Queen of the Gods, offered lands and power. Athena, the Wise Warrior, offered victory in battle. Aphrodite, mother of Persuasion, offered Helen as bride. He chose Helen, wife of Menelaus and most beautiful of all mortal women, and the Trojan War began.”

“So, the Golden Apple rolled in, and competition, confusion, and contention began.”

“But Lady Aphrodite uses love and beauty to heal these hurts and smooth these problems. Loving words can untangle confusion. A loving touch can ease contention. A loving smile can erase competition.”

“So Aphrodite claims the symbol of the apple, and makes it Hers. Truly, Love Conquers All Things.”

Pour a measure of wine to the ground (or libation bowl).
“Sponde!”

As the salt and phallus cakes are distributed to each celebrant, the Hiereia says, “Salt water swallowed Ouranos’ genitals, and the sea foamed in delight to bring forth Golden Aphrodite. Take this salt and this phallus, reminders of Her birth, and have joy and regeneration of your own through Love.”

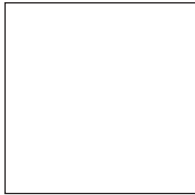
Commence the feast.



AUTUMN JOURNEY

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Η ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ

(HE EPISTOLE)

a newsletter for Hellenic polytheists

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HE EPISTOLE – CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS!

HE EPISTOLE (a "message" or "letter") is published four times a year. We offer articles, artwork, hymns, prayers, poetry, reviews, information, community notices, fiction, recipes, and anything else of interest to the Hellenic polytheist community.

We're currently seeking submissions from guest writers.

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