

Η ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ

He Epistole



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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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HOUSE ALTARS – ANCIENT GREECE AND TODAY

By Joao Miguel Oliveira

Most people who worship the Ancient Greek Gods today will, more often than not, do it alone or with their families. No more huge festivals held by the entire polis. Quite the opposite - our definition of huge has been scaled down to a point that a gathering of ten people is considered impressive.

We can also see this change in altars. From impressive structures surrounded by a complex of temples, treasures, and gardens they have become small tables that may be used for other purposes as well as for ritual. While this may be okay for the less orthodox among us, I've often wondered if it isn't somewhat hypocritical to say that we follow the Ancient Greek Religion (to the point of celebrating harvest festivals related to a completely different climate) and violate what several scholars have called the most essential element of cult.

The altar (bomos) was in fact always the first element of a temple. It was the place where the first sacrifice was made and the temple and temenos were built around it, the altar not moving, even when upgraded from a simple pit in the ground to a complete building.

But religion was not just about temples, city festivals, or cult centers. There was an element present in the privacy of the oikos, the house or family. Our knowledge of this element is incomplete but it is clear that it existed.

Most scholars and worshipers focus on the polis because that's the element we can find more evidence for – popular beliefs aren't expressed in literature, or are expressed only later, and house artifacts won't survive the ages like major religious pieces do. For this reason we don't know what most house altars were like, who used them, and how.

It is often stated that altars were built in sacred places. Houses, however, were not temenoi. All sorts of human activity was happening all the time and this poses a conundrum – if gods are repulsed by miasma, how come there are altars and rituals inside the house?

First, there is plenty of evidence that houses could be purified and that some people would even be specialists in doing this. Furthermore, in Menander's *Ghost* we learn that anyone can create a sacred space using ritual behavior and that this sacred space exists only for the duration of the ritual.

Second, although it is clear that for major festivals and temples miasma was a big concern, we cannot say that



the gods themselves are repulsed by ritual pollution – when drinking wine devotees would make a libation for the Daimon; in birth Artemis is present; in sex we have Aphrodite; and even Apollo, god of purification and the sacred island of Delos where concerns with miasma were taken to an extreme, came to the aid of his priest after a prayer where no purification was involved.

In fact, we know about several cults that were held in the privacy of the house: Zeus Ktesios, who was offered the panspermia; the Dioskouroi to whom people offered meals (theoxenia) and whose symbols were the amphorae; Zeus Herkeios with his altar where a fresh garland was always to be found; and even the Herm, just by the entrance. And, of course, the sacred Hestia, the hearth which blessed the meals themselves, turning each time the family and guests joined to eat into a sacred event.

The traditional altars were built of stone, bones, ashes, bricks, or simply earth. By traditional I mean temple altars. These were often outside and might or might not be prepared to burn sacrifices and might or might not be raised.

Of house altars we have fewer examples and descriptions. We know they were often in the courtyard and gardens and were probably part of a shrine, but they are as varied as the people who kept them. Some were a small hole in the wall with an image. Many were built of stone or terracotta and meant to be transported and people would take their altar with them when they moved. Most were not decorated although we find some with the name of the god they were dedicated to, or with built-in decoration.

Others were not on display and were built from whatever the person had available and only for the duration of the ritual.

There are many similarities with altars from temples as well as with herms. The main differences are size (much smaller), the fact that many were temporary and could be moved, and the existence of portable altars.

We know that these altars were common, because, even if we can only find a few, they are often implied in literature and Socrates, in *Euthydemus*, even says “I too have altars and household hiera and patroia and artefacts of the same type as other Athenians”. They were so common, in fact, that Plato criticizes them in *Laws*.

What we don’t know a lot about is how they were used. It was the father of the household who would often perform the rituals that might have been related to changes in composition and structure of the family (such as wedding, birth, coming of age, and death) or meant to maintain a relationship with specific household and family gods.

The altars were used for both regular and punctual rituals and common items you could find on an altar were incense, cakes, wine, figurines, and garlands. A few households had several such altars, and Xenophon tells us that some were used for frequent sacrifices while others were reserved for special festivals.

Evidence from house cults contrasts with temple and sanctuary cults in terms of variety and scale and it reflects the personal religious needs and motives of each family and person. In fact, it gives an argument for the use of house altars and even the creation of personal (and more meaningful) versions of altars and festivals that I think we can all learn from.

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WRITTEN ON THE WAVES

By Jennifer Lawrence

I have never seen the ocean, save
As pictures in books, on TV, in film,
And yet I feel your tidal rhythms
Flow through me,
Too powerful to be denied.
Fearful in the way that all deep
And unexplored reaches are fearful—
Abrim with strange treasure:
Coral reef, pearl bank, little fish like gems
Spangling those dark and liquid depths
--and you, serene and stormy by turns,
Undisputed monarch
Bearded with whitecap foam
And I, so small in comparison,
Chained by unseen bonds,
(Your salt tides
Ebb and rip in my blood)
Can only bow in silent awe.



ARISTAIOS

By Lykeia

Aristaios, thou called Nomios and Argeus
Hailed honeyed-one, revered and blest,
Bearer of your father's sacred crest
Of Kheiron's tutelage, at Apollon's behest,
You Libyan, Theban, Arcadian; you of all men
What benevolence did you not lend?
Oil flows, honey flows, milk flows, all together
They flow. And the rains and winds unfettered
They flow. Generation to generation they flow
And the shepherd guards, he reaps and sows
Playing upon the idyllic pipes, singing life,
Of all the joys, the loves, birth and sacrifice
As Actaeon leaps to death, horns on his head
And Eurydike departs, lamented, to the dead.

Yet with ingenuity and care the ox rises again
What summer's dog-star wastes away you regain
And the calf is reborn on the mountain of Lykaios
Born from the loamy sacrificial blood, they revive
As the golden bees arise from earthen hive.
What departs comes again, autumn to spring,
And the dirge gives way for life to joyously sing.
So hail to you fosterer of Dionysos, twice-born
The Euboian cave received him, the wheat-ear's corn,
Murmur to golden Melissa, to nurse him best
On milk and honey by nymphs revered and blest.



Aristaios Divine Family By Lykeia

FOR ARES ENYALIOS

By Peter Helms

Ares Enyalios, Brazen god of the spear,
Rallier of men to battle,
We offer unto you our victories at the end of this season
that you have ensured
And for your glory offer many more to come with the next.
Drive us, oh Obrimos, that we may accept only victory in
the company of your companions,
That we may accept victory or death and nothing more
Victory from Golden Aphrodite
Victory from Deimos
Victory from Phobos
Victory from Agon
Victory from Harmonia
Let men sing your praises from the gore of the fallen
Let men sing your praises from the high walls of their homes



Let us dance as the Spartoi for your amusement
 As you have brought us victory in war, we pray you bring us
 strength in peace
 Let us bear strong and sharp children
 Let us bear order upon our disordered land
 Let us exchange arms for the labors of the field;
 Encourage peace, to gentle works inclined,
 And give abundance, with benignant mind.

Festivals to Ares, though rare in Greece, occurred during autumn, as Ares was said to rule during the time of Scorpio. In addition, the Spartan and Macedonian New Year would fall in October, which is the end of the year's campaign season. This is a most fitting time to sacrifice to Ares. Ares' festivals were often attended by either sex, but not together—men and women sacrificed to Ares separately. It was more common for men to sacrifice to Ares, but there was a women's only festival celebrating the victory of the women of Tegea over Spartan invasion.

Incorporated in the above prayer are many allusions to the cult and poetic titles of Ares, which highlight both his violent and non-violent natures, for he was worshipped as both a war-like god and a giver of order and bounty. Ares was often worshipped alongside Aphrodite. The last four lines of the poem come from the Orphic Hymn to Ares, which I included in my poem to highlight the style which is common to Aresian poetry and literature— a supplication to the god for peace, for that is the ultimate goal and reward of war.

THE STORY OF PERSEUS

By John Hopper

Perseus was the son of the divine Zeus and Danaë, a mortal. Danaë's father, Acrisius, was King of Argos. An oracle told him he would one day be killed by Danaë's future son. To prevent his daughter conceiving a child, Acrisius locked her away. But, Zeus transformed himself into a shower of gold and impregnated Danaë. Perseus was born of this union.

Acrisius, still desperate to frustrate the oracle's prediction, shut Danaë and her baby in a large wooden chest. He threw them into the sea to perish. But, Zeus sent favourable winds and they came gently to shore on the island of Seriphos. A fisherman found them and brought them before Polydectes, the king. Polydectes was most hospitable. He arranged for Perseus to be cared for by the priests at Athene's temple. As time went by, Polydectes became violently enamoured of Danaë. But, he was wary of her now grown son. He held a sumptuous feast. Those invited were expected to come bearing lavish gifts. The cunning Polydectes knew that Perseus could not afford to bring an expensive present. Instead of such a gift, Perseus undertook to bring Polydectes the head of the Gorgon Medusa.

Medusa was so hideous that anyone who looked at her face was turned to stone in an instant. She had live serpents for hair. Zeus, ruler of the gods, ensured that his son would be helped in accomplishing this dangerous task. Hades, king of the underworld, gave Perseus the helmet of invisibility. Hermes, the divine messenger, lent

his winged sandals. Athene provided a sword and a shield so bright that it could be used as a mirror.

Perseus set off on his quest. He first went to the Graiae, sisters of the Gorgons. They were old hags who shared one eye and one tooth. While they slept, Perseus, cloaked by the helmet of invisibility, stole their sole eye and tooth. He only returned them after the Graiae had told him exactly where to find Medusa.

Shod in Hermes' sandals, Perseus flew to the far-off abode of the Gorgons. He avoided looking directly at Medusa by using his shield to mirror her reflection. Inspired with courage by Athene, he cut off the Medusa's head with his sword. With this ghastly object carefully stowed in a sturdy bag, Perseus began the journey home.

As he flew over the Libyan desert, some of Medusa's blood dripped from the bag. Drops landed in the sand and changed into myriad serpents. The sun was setting as Perseus came to the western ends of the earth where the giant Atlas was king. Seeking hospitality, Perseus informed Atlas that Zeus was his father. The giant, though, remembered an ancient oracle's words that a son of Zeus would steal the golden fruits from his gardens. Atlas told Perseus to be off. A quarrel ensued. As the giant was too powerful for him to defeat in combat, Perseus used Medusa's head to turn Atlas into a towering mountain.



Next day, as Perseus was flying over the coast of Ethiopia, he spied a beautiful maiden chained to a rock. Her name was Andromeda. Cepheus, the Ethiopian king, was her father. She was betrothed to her uncle Phineus, brother of Cepheus. Andromeda's mother, Cassiopeia, had boasted of being more beautiful than the goddess Hera or any of the nymphs of the sea. Enraged, Poseidon, god of the ocean, sent a sea-monster to ravage the kingdom. The only way to appease Poseidon and stop the monster was to offer Andromeda up in sacrifice. Her sorrowing parents watched as she was tied naked to the rock for the monster to devour.

Struck by her beauty and curious about her situation, Perseus landed and spoke with Cepheus. He offered to rescue Andromeda in exchange for her hand in marriage. Her father was only too happy to agree. Perseus flew to battle with the monster as it rose from the sea. After a mighty fight, Perseus, at last, delivered the death blows with his sword. Andromeda was saved.

The marriage of Perseus and Andromeda was celebrated with great joy. But in the midst of these rejoicings, Phineus entered with his armed followers and attempted to abduct his former fiancée. Slaughter and mayhem ensued. Perseus fought valiantly. Phineus and his supporters were defeated. Perseus eventually used the Medusa's head to petrify Phineus and several of his men.

Perseus went back to Seriphos with Andromeda. He discovered that, to escape Polydectes' lechery, his mother had sought refuge at Athene's altar. To avenge Danaë and punish her tormenter, Perseus used Medusa's head to turn Polydectes and his accomplices to stone. Then, he presented the head to Athene who mounted it on her aegis. He also gave her back the sword and mirror-shield and returned the helmet of invisibility to Hades and the winged sandals to Hermes.

Following these adventures, Perseus, accompanied by his wife and mother, left Seriphos and sailed homewards. On the way, he stopped off at Larissa to participate in some funeral games. During a quoits game, Perseus threw a quoit that was carried off by a strong gust and struck and killed an old man—none other than his grandfather Acrisius, who, upon hearing of Perseus' imminent return and still fearful of the oracle's prediction, had fled Argos for sanctuary in Larissa. Perseus was seized with grief when he learnt he had accidentally killed his grandfather. He did not want accept his rightful kingship. Instead, he exchanged his throne of Argos for that of Tirynthus, a neighbouring kingdom. There he settled and built the mighty city of Mycenae. After death he was transformed into a celestial constellation.

Modelling Perseus's Journey

The greater part of Perseus myth sits reasonably well within the Campbell model for a hero's journey. However, its beginning and ending do not. The beginning more closely fits with Leeming's first stage: 'the miraculous conception and birth and the hiding of the child'. The hero has Zeus, ruler of the gods, for a father and is conceived in a shower of gold. Soon after birth, he and his mother are hidden in a chest and left to perish.

Stages in the Campbell Model

1. The call to adventure

Perseus is well brought up. He lives a normal, healthy sort of life. But, he cannot afford to bring a lavish gift to Polydectes' banquet (and Polydectes knows this). Not wishing to abuse the rules of hospitality, Perseus volunteers to bring Polydectes the Gorgon's head. Polydectes willingly agrees, as he knows Perseus could quite well be killed attempting this dangerous task—and even if he succeeds, the quest will keep him away for quite a while. In either case, Polydectes has the chance to pursue Danaë unhindered. Polydectes, a mentor to Perseus while he was growing up, has transformed into an adversary.

2. Crossing the threshold

The threshold is crossed when Perseus leaves the familiar surrounds of Seriphos, his home since childhood, and sets out on his quest.

3. Test and helpers

Perseus' helpers are Athene, Hades and Hermes. After he has resolved to go on his quest, and just prior to his crossing the threshold, these immortals give Perseus magical aids that will help him to succeed. In a perverse way too, after he has obtained it, the Medusa's head becomes one of Perseus' helpers in his accomplishment of subsequent heroic deeds. The myth does not quite fit with an inflexible linear chronological interpretation of the model, in that 'helpers' appear as the hero is on the point of crossing the threshold, rather than after he has crossed it. But my view is that mythological time, whatever the model, should be far more flexible.

Perseus' first test is to get the Graiae to tell him of Medusa's whereabouts. Again, the myth deviates from strict linear sequence, as other tests follow, rather than precede, the supreme ordeal.

4. The supreme ordeal

This is the slaying of the Gorgon. Arguably though, Perseus faces two supreme ordeals—the other being his later conquest of Poseidon's sea-monster.

5. Flight or return

Perseus' return to Seriphos is interrupted by several incidents. He faces the test of defeating Atlas, the ordeal of rescuing Andromeda and the test of the battle with Phineus.

6. Restoration

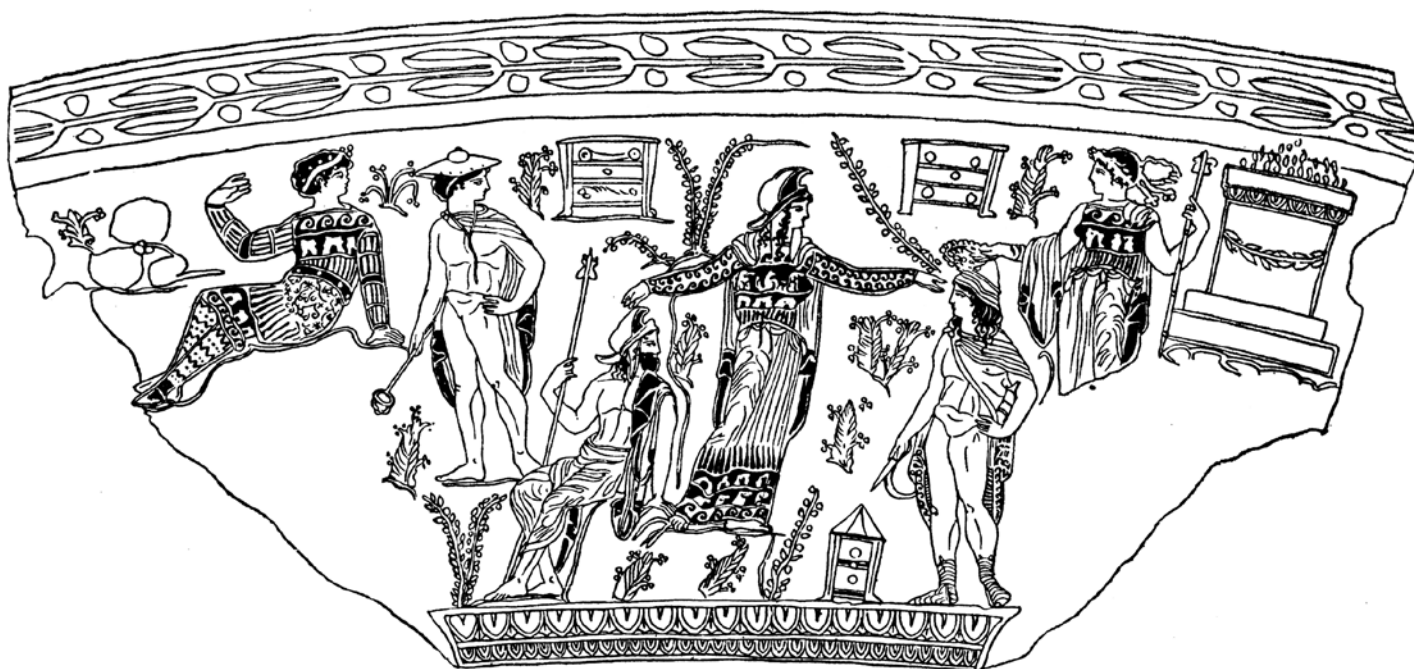
There is a struggle at the threshold of Perseus' return to

familiar surroundings—he has to rescue his mother from assault by Polydectes. After defeating Polydectes, Perseus returns his magic aids, including Medusa's head. Things are restored to normal.

The rest of the tale fits more comfortably into the final stage of Leeming's model: 'ascension, apotheosis and atonement'. Perseus sails for Argos, his actual birthplace. This has elements of an 'ascension' about it—a journey back to the ancestors. But, fate has ordained that he kill his grandfather. After accidentally slaying Acrisius, Perseus atones by refusing to rule Argos. He exiles himself to Tirynthus where he is much admired for his wise rule and former deeds. His apotheosis becomes complete after he dies and is raised to the heavens—a cosmic ascension. Andromeda also is lifted heavenwards after death. The two remain together as constellations in the night sky.

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BLESSED HELIOGENNA

By K.S. Roy



COMMUNITY BULLETIN BOARD

By K.S. Roy

News gathered from the wider Polytheist community

- **Calls for Submissions from Bibliotheca Alexandrina:**
We are currently seeking poetry, short fiction, scholarly essays, rituals, recipes, meditations, artwork and other submissions for several other devotional projects.
<http://neosalexandria.org/bibliotheca-alexandrina/>

- **Guardian of the Road: A Devotional Anthology in Honor of Hermes** [edited by **K.S. Roy**]. Submissions will open in **August 2011** and close on **31 January 2012**. Projected release date of **March 2012**. Submissions can be sent to Kadynastar78@yahoo.com; please place devotional title in the subject line.

- **Shield of Wisdom: A Devotional Anthology in Honor of Athena** [edited by **Jason Ross Inczauskis**]. Submissions will open in **September 2011** and close on **31 February 2012**. Projected release date of **April 2012**. Submissions can be sent to athenadevotional@gmail.com; please place devotional title in the subject line.

- **Unto Herself: A Devotional Anthology for Independent Goddesses** [edited by **Ashley Horn**]. Submissions will open in **November 2011** and close on **31 March 2012**. Projected release date of **May 2012**. Submissions can be sent to rian3x3@gmail.com; please place devotional title in the subject line.

- **The Shining Cities: An Anthology of Pagan Science Fiction** [edited by **Rebecca Buchanan**]. Submissions will open in **January 2012** and close on **30 June 2012**. Projected release date of **August 2012**. Submissions can be sent to baeditor@gmail.com; please place devotional title in the subject line.

- Community Bulletin Board is a regular feature. If there is something you would like to be posted here, please email me at Kadynastar78@yahoo.com

HERA, THE "WICKED STEPMOTHER"

How mythic metaphor shapes our spiritual lives in our understanding of Hera

By Lykeia

There is a lot of scholarly dialogue in regards to the mythic portrayal of Hera as a jealous and vindictive goddess towards the children of Zeus. The outcome of these discussions often reaches a consensus among many of them that this relationship between Hera and the offspring of her husband is typical of how ancient Hellenes viewed the lot of stepchildren. Therefore, to summarize their opinion on this matter, if all stepmothers were characterized as cruel to their stepchildren, this then made Hera the grand bitch of all stepmothers in their eyes. This, as the consensus seems to imply, that if a wife was considered to be by nature selfish and jealous beings which extends to the offspring of their husband, then Hera is justified to have such a temperament and to carry more severe grudges and forms of retribution as the queen goddess. It is certainly not unheard of among some modern worshipers to view the relationship of Zeus and Hera in terms not far removed from this idea. This opinion is clear whether it comes in the form of Hera being thought of as something of a shrew, or justified in her behavior and as a being potentially emotionally abused by her philandering husband. The latter has particularly been a favorite of extremist feminist worshipers who consider Hera as an unhistorical native queen deity that had been overridden and trapped into marriage by a new god introduced by an influx of patriarchal sky-worshipers. This view was particularly coined in a made for TV movie about Herakles. An example of how common this view is can be seen from Wikipedia's description of Hera: "Hera was known for her jealous and vengeful nature, most notably against Zeus's lovers and offspring..."

However, this insult seems to be derived too much from a simplistic view of the relationship between Zeus and Hera, and a painfully literal take on the myths. In the end, this presents a vision of Hera that is corrupted and derogatory to the nature of the goddess. In order to undo some of this damage it is best to refer again to the myths themselves, but rather than taking them as literal tales descriptive of the personality of the goddess, to see them as metaphors to how Hera acts upon the children of her spouse. However, because of the grandness in scope of Hera's domain for purposes of clarity this essay shall be dealing with understanding Hera's role as the stepmother specifically rather than making any attempt to deal with the entire bulk of the goddess's myths and cults. However before we can speak of her mythic jealousy towards the children of Zeus, we must first speak of the root of this jealousy in the lovers of her husband as the first indication of this predisposition in myth.



Domestic Harmony: Aphrodite and Hera By Lykeia

For an individual taking a myth literally it may seem cruelly vindictive the way the goddess pursues and torments the lovers of her husband. Such an example could be found in the myth of Leto, who was said by Hesiod to have been a lover of Zeus, in succession of his unions with Metis, Themis and Mnemosyne, before he joined in marriage with Hera. Pregnant as Leto was upon the marriage of Zeus and Hera it set the stage for the goddess to act upon this lover of her husband, perhaps less for being his lover and more for bearing his offspring. This idea is repeated in many myths in which the goddess is depicted as striking out against women who dare to bear the children of Zeus. Therefore Hera is seen as taking revenge upon these women in most cases, though it didn't seem to be the case with Alkmene, and subsequently their children.

There is of course a close similarity here between the tale of the wanderings of Leto and that of Io who, in the form of a cow, was caused to wander stung as she was by a gadfly sent by Hera. Thus she driven and tormented before she finally came to rest in Egypt, where she regained her human form and gave birth to her son Epaphos. Likewise, her predecessor, Leto, was sent wandering from place to place, unpermitted to rest and deliver her babes until she came upon the island of Asteria, or Delos. In both cases we see a difficult journey with a destination that is eventually achieved, and typically a very specific destination predestined in mind which we can infer from Kallimachus' hymn to Delos in which Apollon, still in the womb, likewise acted against his birth until reaching Delos. For this we must reexamine the role of Hera as a "jealous wife" a bit more closely, for even though there may be something "reasoning" in the myth as to why the goddess no longer is acting vengefully against them (such as the claim that Hera made that she would not act against Asteria for harboring Leto because she honored her for not succumbing to Zeus' seduction), one cannot ignore that there is a term limit to their journey and the torment that they endure. In fact it is so obvious that it is not enduring in that Leto is described as being at the side of Zeus in greeting Apollon's return to Olympos in the Homeric Hymn to Apollon.

So then, if Hera is not acting continuously out of an unending source of jealousy then how may we interpret her relationship with these other females in myth? After all for every case that there is an instance where Hera sets aside her anger in the cases of Ino and Leto they appear to be countered by other examples such as the deaths of Semele and Kallisto, the latter of whom Hera asked Artemis to slay according to some versions of the myth. To find an answer we have to look at the myths of Ino and Leto from a slightly different perspective. Far from being a mythic side note of yet another affair of Zeus, in Argos Ino appears to have been an important part of the cultus of Hera, wherein Ino was identified with a priestess by the name of Kallithyia. According to Strabo, a mournful procession was carried out yearly for Ino. A ritualized mourning seems invocative of a relationship between Hera and Io that is beyond jealous wife and lover, especially when taken place within Hera's great citadel. Such mourning was typically for deceased "heroes" who were loved by the gods, such as that of Aphrodite's Adonis and Apollon's Hyakinthos.

Some clue may also be derived from a scene from a throne of Aphrodite in the Spartan city Amyclae in which Hera is gazing upon Io in the form of a cow, an animal particularly associated with Hera's cult. It certainly appears that in the case of Io we have a subject which is strongly identified with the cult of the goddess in question, likely associated to a degree with the goddess through affection. Thus the character of the mourning in Argos can even suggestive of

a playing out of a mythic mourning of the goddess for the absence of her priestess. Such can be demonstrated by the fact that Hera is said to have admired the white heifer and kept her upon receiving her as a gift from Zeus; though this can be seen as a strategy in order for Hera to control her rival, there is obviously more to it as Hera is explicitly said to have admired the heifer, knowing that it was Io. Likewise the guardian of Io was himself elevated after his death as Argus became the peacock, her sacred bird.

This likewise emanates through her fondness for the hero Jason by the naming of his ship, Argo. If we can take a moment of consideration to envision the potent of the name Argo as that vessel which protects and carries forth the hero favored by the goddess, it seems indicative in some sense of Hera's potential affiliation with Io. Even the identification of Io with Isis, who is in turn has been identified often with Hera, also puts their relationship into an interesting context. It almost seems a logical extension of the myth that Hera would have the Kouretes attempt to kidnap Io's infant if it is but in an act of reclaiming. The babe is essentially seized by Hera and Io comes forth the Syria, a place greatly associated with the cult of Aphrodite, to be reunited with her child. The intervention of Zeus seems more or less as a plot device used in the myth for the recovery of Epaphos. In fact, it could almost be said that the myth is more about the relationship and cultus of Io and Hera than having much of anything directly to do with Zeus other than those moments when he steps in and takes some overt action to move things along.

Hera also took a more personal interest in the wanderings of Leto than we typically see, even to the point where she engaged Python, a serpent very much connected to Hera in the Homeric version of the birth of Typhon recounted in the hymn to Apollon, to follow the Titanide. In other cases it was Helios who was instructed as overseer of Leto's activities. Hera also intersects personally at some points as the Ephesians also tell of her attempt to spy on the birth of Artemis at Ortygia. In response the Kouretes frightened her away by banging on their shields, echoing the manner in which the Zeus was hidden from Kronos. This suggests a strong maternal tie between Artemis and Hera in the least, or a similar successive connection. One that seems to carry over in her maternal disciplining of the younger goddess as Homer poetically referred to when Hera beat Artemis with her own bow, something less than severe and more humiliation than hurt in a war between the gods. Not to mention the identification of Artemis with Eleithyia, as indicated by the Orphic hymn and the Kretan assertions that Artemis and Apollon were born on Krete, thus plausibly establishing them as children of Hera, and likely by extension at Samos too, as in Thrace where Hera was depicted flanked on either side by Apollon and Artemis.

But that is getting ahead of things and veering off course, even if it does indicate that in some places there may have been some cultic relationship between Hera and Leto.

A connection is possible in any case where there may be a maternal link between two goddesses. In the case of the Eleusinian myth of Artemis as the daughter of Demeter we may refer to some relationship between the latter goddess and Leto in a cult established in Asia Minor where Leto was viewed as a deity associated with the dead; and which may have some relationship to the mythic introduction of frogs by Leto and their association with the underworld as described by Aristophanes in his "Frogs." Such subtle connection may be indicated by the very similar veils that neither goddess is seen without, such a relationship could be as a maternal womb from which Artemis, who bears a close resemblance to the virginal Hera, would spring, but this is just speculation.

But all of this aside, what is important in the myth of Leto is that Hera has some being doggedly pursue her whether it was Python, or the eye of Helios that watched over all the journey of the Titanide. That and of course the abject threat against any who would harbor Leto that few dared to risk, the exceptions being the river Peneus (who Leto declined in fear for him), and Asteria. This would place Leto in a position similar to that of Io, though with undertones of commonality with the myth of Herakles that, whereas Herakles had twelve labors to perform, Leto wandered twelve days and twelve nights in the course of her maternal labor. Therein we can see the myth of Leto as one which combines some components of the heroic journey of Herakles, as a divine being directly connected to Zeus, as well as those components which are similar to the myth of Io. And like Herakles, after the completion of the journey Hera was agreeable to set aside her anger wherewith Apollon and Artemis, born Olympians, rarely suffered any at the hand of their stepmother thereby negating the blind role that Hera is often thrust into as a jealous and vindictive stepmother figure.

The myths of Io and Leto then are unique when compared to the myths of Semele and Kallisto, among numerous others of Zeus's loves in that typically in the case of these latter ladies Hera is less directly involved. However what registers as mythic cruelty often serves a very important purpose. For instance Kallisto, slain and set among the stars, immortalized, seems to be punished by Hera in that she is never permitted to descend and wash herself in the waters of Okeanos, but forever circles in her endless course, and yet the constellations of the bears are the indicators of the changing seasons as Ursa Major changes her form between spring and winter, the "cup" either directed upward as if gathering some kind of heavenly water in the winter, and downward as if pouring out upon the earth in the spring. As

Hera is often associated with the starry skies, and the Orphic hymn refers to her connection with rain and storms, the substance common in the autumn and spring in the changing of the year, Kallisto can almost be seen a celestial handmaiden of the goddess that is "cursed" to maintain her pivotal place.

After all, she is perhaps one of the most recognized constellations in the sky, indicating always the direction of true north by the axis of the heavens around which she so closely circles, and as such was a highly valuable sign of navigation for ancient sailors. As such a well recognized and important constellation hers is one of few that is directly mentioned by Euripedes in regards to those stars adorning the great tapestries which were taken from the temple at Delphi in his play "Ion" alongside Orion and the Pleiades. Therefore what we are seeing here is a kind of divine elevation of Kallisto which may make further sense if consider the role of the arktoi in Hellas, which may been in linked in Argos with the myth Kallisto as some evidence seems to suggest according to one scholar. As the arktoi is a celebration largely of transformation from childhood to adulthood, it almost highlights the transformational nature of Hera's interaction with Kallisto in a positive rather than negative fashion. Therefore destruction in such myths is a metaphor of divine transformation.

In the case of Semele, though her destruction was brought about by Hera (much like that of Coronis by Artemis) it provides a medium of divine birth of Dionysos especially as it institutes his second birth from the thigh of his father. Therefore it is clear that the result of Hera's actions against the mothers of Zeus' children is one which is creating an environment of transformation by imposing great obstacles against those whom Zeus loves that would bear out the result through their greater offspring. It is a metaphor of the progress and fruitification of the soul by the environment which Hera establishes in conjunction with the union of Zeus for those who are belonging to these two gods. And as Zeus and Hera are the greatest among the Olympians is natural that souls embraced by them are those who would experience the greatest trials.

Though these trials are often turned against the mothers which we have seen above, the semi-divine heroic soul, it produces the infant that is to progress to greater heights as we see from the trials and tribulations of Dionysos and Herakles. The Labors imposed on Herakles and his life is perhaps one of the best known myths, and therefore little time will be spent in great detail on it here. Herakles, whose name means "the Glory of Hera," suffers much hardship in myth starting from his infancy when Hera sent two serpents, keeping in mind that serpents are not only chthonic symbols but are also associated with rebirth and

immortality, to his cradle over which he gained mastery.

Though Herakles is esteemed much as Zeus' greatest son, his connection with Hera as a maternal source is quite profound. Myth tells of Hera being tricked into nursing Herakles in that the infant was settled into her bed with the goddess unaware, yet most artistic depictions show the goddess cradling and actively nursing the babe. Thus in his infancy Hera has sent the vehicle by which Herakles will gain mastery over his mortal death and achieve immortality. This has a strong relationship with a telling of the myth of Dionysos, whose name alternatively derives from his father Zeus unlike that of Herakles.

Plato, in his *Laws*, says that Hera had stolen from Dionysos at his birth the judgment of his soul, in response to which Dionysos created wine to serve as substitute. It seems that the nature of this retelling is indicating that the judgment of the soul referred to here seems to be that of a kind of weighing of the soul to determine its destination. Hera removed an automatic determination for the divinity of his soul, and his quest in order to supplement this he has brought forth the wine, and his mystic rites, in order to serve this purpose. The wonderfully sneaky thing about this is that it serves not only for him own purpose, but in Hera's purpose it serves for all humanity.

We see similar correlations between the myths of Dionysos and Herakles through their madness, their journeys and labors (and said pronouncements of these labors by Apollon in order for them to achieve divinity), the introduction of the subject of slavery, and their eventual establishment among the gods which renders them both as important intermediary deities between mortals and the divine. Dionysos is the companion of the initiate, the human soul moving forward through mortal lives, and Herakles is the receiver of the hunt, the souls hunted into evolution by Artemis, previously a role held by Apollon, thereby indicating their important stations in the cosmos and as champions for the human souls all of which came about through being acted upon by Hera.

Sadly the role in which Hera plays has either been completely vilified, such as has been done by most media retellings in movies and most frequently in the TV series "Hercules: the Legendary Journeys," or has completely removed Hera's participation making her superfluous, such as in Disney's animated movie "Hercules," though the former case is more typical and has even influenced some modern depictions of Hera in which she has a cruel edge to her features. Neither case does her relationship with these heroic divine beings any justice. Instead of a terrible stepmother we should see Hera perhaps more likely as a fostering mother, which is plainly indicative by some myths of Medea wherein she leaves her babes at

the altar of Hera Akraia (Hera of the Heights). She is perhaps a strict mother, but one who is working towards the growth of the child. And growth is never an easy process.

Therefore it is highly erroneous to see Hera as an evil and punitive stepmother going about the purposely inflict harm or death upon her stepchildren, but rather she is demanding in their development because of the station of their divine parentage, for which they are eventually rewarded just as Herakles, upon reaching Olympos, was given her daughter Hebe for his wife. Hera and Artemis together are very important deities involved in the maturation of the individual for adulthood, whether that is biological adulthood which include emotional and social responsibility, or spiritual adulthood. This fostering idea is also apparent in alternative versions of the myth of Medea in which she was said to have left her babes at the altar of Hera Akraia (Hera of the Heights). But Hera is more than just a foster mother, when you get right down to it Hera is the mother of all, and nowhere can this be seen more plainly than in the myth of Zagreus.

On the surface Zagreus is perhaps one of the more brutal of the myths associated with Hera's "jealousy." Unlike Epaphos, who bears a startling resemblance to Zagreus in that in both cases Hera is said to have been jealous of the infants' power, Zagreus was not merely kidnapped but utterly dismembered. The difference may very well be in the fact that Zagreus was the most esteemed child of Zeus, and even the thunderbolts were set into the babe's hands as a symbol of his authority. It was Hera who spurred the Titans into action against Zagreus that they set a trap for the infant and consumed him. As most, who are familiar with the myth of Zagreus, are aware, after this event had occurred Zeus smote the Titans with his thunderbolt, disintegrating them into ashes whereas the remains of Zagreus were buried by Apollon at Parnassus, and the heart was taken up by Athena to later be given to Semele for the conception of Dionysos. Therefore it wasn't a death but more like a sleep, as echoed in such fairytales such as Snow White. It was from these ashes that human beings have sprung when the earth was taken up by Prometheus and Zeus to create humanity, thus delivering the divine spark of immortality to all.

Likewise it can be said that the second generation of humanity arose likewise from Zagreus remains if we considered that his burial place, his tomb, was in that same local in which Deukalion and his family landed and recreated a population by throwing stones behind them. But it was from the blood of Zagreus the pomegranate is said to have sprung, the same fruit which Hera is depicted as holding, crowned as she is by the Kharites (or Graces), and the Horae (Seasons), at her sanctuary at the foot of Mount

Euboea. According to myth it is the fruit which she had offered to Persephone, through a intermediary, “tricking” her into remaining part of every year with her spouse Hades. By this fashion Hera authored the undying souls of humanity, rendering her the mother of all humanity through the death of Zagreus, even while she had a hand is establishing the wheeling cycle of life and death (and thereby evolution and transformation) which is necessary to life. In the end we must see that Hera is far from the

“wicked stepmother” role in which she is so often cast, she is the queenly mother of all humanity and the shaper of those souls which follow in her, and Zeus’s, train.

Khaire Hera!

FEATURED ARTIST: LYKEIA

Lykeia is a writer, poet and artist. A follower of Apollon, much of her work revolves around the god she adores. However as a Hellenic Polytheist, Lykeia is happy to produce art and written material about the various gods that are essential within the religion. Her work can be seen, and purchased, at www.hellenicspiritarts.com.

At right: Daphnephoros,
The Infant Dionysos Lekinites





Clockwise from top left:
Apollon Hyperboreios, Persephone, Panoleptos Pan, Ephesia



By Amanda Sioux Blake

Author of Ink in My Veins and Songs of Praise

The patriarchal nature of ancient Greece, Athens in particular, is much talked about. Despite this prejudice, with even a cursory reading of the *Odyssey* a myriad of strong women is revealed, both antagonists to the hero Odysseus and his helpers, both mortal and divine.

First among the allies of Odysseus is Athena, the revered Goddess of wisdom and war. Throughout the Trojan War, recounted in Homer's *Iliad*, the precursor to the *Odyssey*, She often helps Odysseus in battle. The *Odyssey* begins by showing us a discussion between Zeus, King of the Gods, and Athena. At this point, Odysseus is being held captive by Kalypso, a nymph, on her island. His ship has been destroyed and all his men are dead. Athena convinced Zeus to command Kalypso to let Odysseus go, sending the message through His son Hermes, the Messenger of the Gods. Athena frequently stood up for Odysseus in the counsels of the Gods.

She then disguises Herself as a family friend to go to Odysseus' adult son Telemachus, to rouse him to action. Athena is acting here in Her role as Guide of Heroes. She does not coddle Telemachus, does not do everything for him. Instead She points out the necessary path and inspires him to action. She helped Telemachus to grow up, to go from being a boy to a man. Indeed, Athena is depicted as being intimately involved with all of Odysseus' family. There were several times throughout the action of the book when Penelope had retired to her room and cried, "till Athena cast sweet sleep upon her eyes" (book 19, line 646).

Even when Odysseus has returned home, Athena still helped him. She transformed Odysseus into an old man, aged and dirty, a homeless beggar. She plans with Odysseus and Telemachus, helping them to get revenge on the suitors. At the very end, when the friends of the suitors are ready to start a new war with Odysseus and his family, it is Athena who makes peace between them. "Now hold!" she cried, 'Break off this bitter skirmish; end your bloodshed, Ithakans, and make peace.'" (book 24, line 550)

One of the most interesting characters in the *Odyssey* is the witch Kirke. She starts out as an antagonist, but through the machinations of Hermes and Odysseus becomes an ally. When they landed on Kirke's island, Odysseus sent out some men to scout the island and look for friendly faces. They come upon the house of Kirke, where she greets them and invites them in for a meal and some wine. One of the

men, sensing something is amiss, hangs back, and so he saw the other men turned into swine. He ran back to tell Odysseus, who decided to confront the witch. He took an alternative route through the woods. This time it is Hermes Who helps him. Hermes gave Odysseus a magical herb called moly, which counteracts the witch's magic. When the cursed wine failed to turn Odysseus into a pig, Kirke is amazed, and she exclaimed, "Ah, wonder! Never a mortal man that drank this cup but when it passes his lips he had succumbed. Hale must your heart be and your tempered will. Odysseus then you are, great contender... Put up your weapon in the sheath. We two shall mingle and make love upon our bed. So mutual trust may come of play and love." (page 395-396 of the textbook). She invited the hero into her bed, which Hermes had told Odysseus would happen. Odysseus makes Kirke swear a sacred oath that she will not work any enchantment against him before he will sleep with her, and she turns his men back to their original form, although they are in some ways better than before "younger, more handsome, taller than before" (page 397 of the textbook).

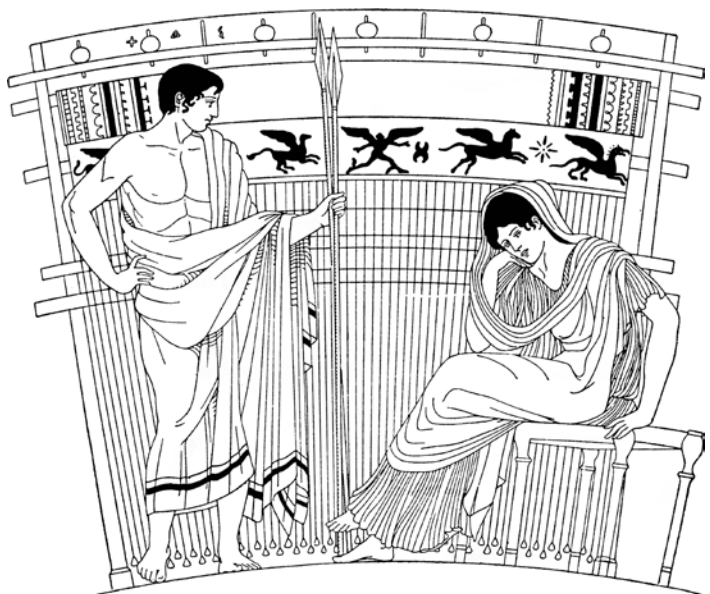
So Odysseus and his men stay on Kirke's island for a full year, feasting and enjoying themselves. When it comes time for them to depart once more, it is Kirke who tells Odysseus that he must descend to the Underworld to seek the counsel of the the blind seer Tiresias. When the descent into the Underworld is accomplished, they return again to Kirke's island. Kirke greets the triumphant travelers with another feast, stocks their ship with needed supplies, and counsels Odysseus on how to get past the sea-monsters Scylla and Charybdis. It is fair to say that without Kirke, Odysseus may have never made it back to Ithaka.

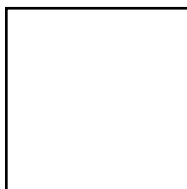
In Greek stories and plays, often the witches are the only (mortal) women with fully fleshed out personalities, besides queens. I cannot recall any instance of a man being portrayed as practicing magic in the stories, although we know from court cases that a few men were historically accused of it. Since, at least in myth, witchcraft is portrayed as a singularly female occupation, we can draw some conclusions about the Greek ideas of female power from Homer's treatment of Kirke. She does not offer her bed to Odysseus until after he has proved himself her equal, since her magic does not work on him. Perhaps this was a trick to save her life, although it might be that Homer was saying that women really want to be conquered. After she is "tamed", so to speak, Kirke is indeed very helpful to

Odysseus and his men. This reminds me of the story of Jason and the Argonauts, who never would have claimed the Golden Fleece if Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love, had not caused the witch Medea to fall in love with Jason. Once tamed by love, she lent her magic to Jason's aid. Both these women are described as very beguiling and tempting. Although the Greeks feared the magic (power) of the witch (woman), they found them irresistible at the same time. Odysseus blames both Kirke and Kalypso for his sleeping with them, saying of Kirke "But in my heart I never gave consent"(book 9, line 35) and that Kalypso "compelled" him (book 5, line 163).

Last but not least there is Penelope, the woman who looms over the whole *Odyssey* as the wife that Odysseus is desperate to return to. She is a fitting mate for the crafty Odysseus, for she is cunning and shrewd in her own way. For twenty years she held the suitors at bay while she waited for Odysseus to return home to Ithaka. As she explains herself "Ruses served my turn to draw time out – first a close-grained web I had the happy thought to set up weaving on my big loom in hall." (book 19, line 145) She told the suitors that she needed to weave a burial shroud for Laertes, Odysseus' father, before she can marry one of them. Every day she worked on weaving the shroud, and every night she un-wove it. This trick worked for three years, but during the fourth year Penelope was betrayed by one of her maids, who was sleeping with one of the suitors, and she was caught un-weaving the shroud. Her ruse discovered, she had no choice but to finish it. Had she not been betrayed by her maid, Penelope's trick may have worked for much longer. Even after all the suitors have taken advantage of her generosity for so many years, she does not become burnt out on giving and continues to follow the law of *Xenia* (hospitality). When Odysseus returned home in the disguise of a old beggar man, Penelope graciously offered him her hospitality.

So one can see now that feminine intelligence dominates the *Odyssey*. This essay has barely discussed the other female antagonist of the *Odyssey*, the nymph Kalypso. It has focused instead on Odysseus' patron Goddess Athena, the witch Kirke, and his wife Penelope. Yet we see here three examples of female power, three different manifestations of feminine power. There is of course the double standard of Penelope remaining faithful while Odysseus gets to enjoy himself with several other women. But for the time, this was a very interesting portrayal of women.





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Η ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ

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**House
Altars**



**The Story
of Perseus**



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