THE SACRED TREE IN ANCIENT GREEK RELIGION

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by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the role played by the tree cult in the religion of the ancient Greeks, and to discuss various aspects and instances of tree worship which survived into the Classical period and later. By this means it is to some extent possible to deduce information regarding the form and character of the religion practised by the early inhabitants of Greece, particularly in the prehistoric period, when tree worship began. To this end, various general remarks have been included on the subject of tree worship as it was manifested in ancient Greek religion, as well as a more detailed account given of three cults in which the tree cult survived in association with the deities venerated there. These were the cults of Artemis Orthia at Sparta, Helen at Therapnai, and Hera at Samos.

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PREFACE

Through the complex fabric of Greek religion runs the thread of the sacredness of the tree to certain gods. Nearly every deity of the Olympic pantheon is associated with a holy tree or grove, and there are numerous other lesser spirits, the nymphs and dryads of hill and forest, who also are connected with the tree cult. Local cults propitiated gods and goddesses bearing little relation to the elevated beings of Olympus whose names they bore, and whose derivation lay in the most primitive level of early nature worship. Strange rites and beliefs were connected with many of the rural cult gods; often, such deities were closely associated in their worship with the sacred tree.

The sacred tree may well be one of the most commonly-recognized religious motifs in the world. Almost universal in its use, the tree represents the dynamic regenerative power of Nature. Nature worship characterizes the earliest phase of religious consciousness in nearly all primitive cultures. The original religion practised and developed by the initial inhabitants of the Greek mainland and islands was no exception to this. From an examination of the various sources, literary and otherwise, and by the application of certain principles of anthropology and comparative reli-

gion, it becomes evident that the veneration of the tree in the cults of the separate gods and goddesses of the Classical pantheon represents the remnants of a religious motif, and its attendant rites, founded in a much more primitive religious stratum in Greek cultural development. Briefly, the tree cult in Greece seems to be the survival of one aspect of what is termed by anthropologists the "animistic" phase of religious consciousness; that is, it is intimately tied in with nature worship, such as was practised on a slightly more sophisticated level by the Minoan and Mycenean peoples.

Eliade tells us that "the tree represented the living cosmos, endlessly renewing itself . . . the tree came to express the cosmos fully in itself by embodying in apparently static form, its "force", its life and its quality of perpetual regeneration."[1] In the religion of the Bronze Age predecessors of the Greek peoples, the tree was in this guise associated with the worship of the maternal life principle of the Earth, in the form of the Mother Goddess, the supreme deity of the Bronze Age Greek pantheon. In later Greek religion, it is the goddesses most nearly related to the old Mother Goddess in character and function who are also most closely allied with the worship of the sacred tree. Such deities as Artemis, Hera, Athena, Demeter, all are connected with some species of tree, and have attributed to them numerous sacred trees and holy groves throughout Greece.

Only remnants of the rites and rudimentary myths, which had once characterized the tree cult and the worship of those divinities to whom the tree was sacred, managed to survive in the complicated and highly anthropomorphic mythological and ritual system of the Classical world. But these scattered references offer the opportunity to gain some understanding of the foundations of religious belief in the Greek world. Often the crude cult stories and rites are to be found only in accounts of the beliefs of isolated and rural communities, and it is to these local cults that the scholar must look for information on early Greek worship. For it is in the folk religion of the agricultural and pastoral inhabitants of the myriad villages which dot the Greek terrain that primitive ritual and belief took longest to fade.[2]

It was also probably in such small, out-of-the-way places, as well, that the remnants of Minoan and Mycenean belief, which so profoundly influenced the developing Hellenic religious system, survived during the so-called Dark Age of Greece, from which period there remains so little in the way of archaeological evidence. The downfall of the urban-oriented princely hegemony of the Bronze Age would have little effect upon the lives of such people as the simple farmers and shepherds of the villages. They would carry on their worship as before, except, perhaps, with a somewhat renewed fervor in face of the hardships of the Dark Ages. Thus, it is in the local cults that the tree cult was preserved, to find

its way into the evolving myths and rituals surrounding the embryonic gods and goddesses of the Olympic pantheon, and thus on into Classical cult.

A single thread, then, such as the worship of the tree, may be traced back from the late source material available on the subject of Greek religion, through the stages of its development to its foundations in primitive nature worship, and provide invaluable information regarding the form and character of such belief at its prehistoric level. Greek religion represents the synthesis of a variety of foreign and indigenous elements, but the tree cult is ubiquitous throughout. In fact, the sacred tree is one of the most important religious motifs to survive as a potent factor in Classical worship.

Despite Nilsson's assertion that there were only two real instances of tree worship in Classical Greece - the tree of Pentheus and the plane of Helen at Sparta - there remained several centres in which elements of the old tree cult had clearly survived in the cultic rites and myths.[3] Any full-scale attempt to examine all such remnants to be found in literature, art, and through archaeological means is, of course, beyond the scope of a graduate dissertation. Rather, the examination of a single cult, that of Artemis Orthia as she was worshipped in her Spartan cult, offers

intriguing sidelights upon the worship of the sacred tree, at least in Laconia. The strange and bloody rites practised in honour of that deity may be attributed in part to her function as goddess of the sacred lygos tree (vitex agnus castus).

Two other cults which are curiously connected with both the tree cult and that of Artemis Orthia are the cults of Helen at Therapnai and of Hera at the Samian Heraion. Helen was the goddess of the plane tree and Hera of the lygos. There are several similarities between the cults, both on literary and mythological, as well as on archaeological grounds. All hold echoes of ancient tradition regarding the worship of the tree, and merit closer analysis in relation to one another than they have hitherto received.

As a preliminary to the chapters dealing with these three cults individually, it seems reasonable to include some general material regarding the tree cult as manifested in ancient Greek religion. A second chapter is also included; this deals with various motifs which are repeatedly to be found in association with tree worship.

Finally, the reader will no doubt note the dependence of the author upon the invaluable travelogue of Pausanias, compiled in the second century of our era. He lists many an instance of a sacred tree or grove which he came upon in the course of his travels, and, in connection with which

even in his own day, rites were still being carried out. The rituals he describes represent a very primitive form of nature worship in some cases, and many were probably the remnants of the very earliest phase of religion practised by the inhabitants of Greece. His account attests to the longevity of ancient rite and cult in rural areas, and to the ubiquity of the tree cult throughout the Greek world, even at the late date of his writing.

Notes to Pages v to x.

[1]Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion (New York: 1963), pl 271.

[2]Martin P. Nilsson, Geschichte der Griechischen Religion vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Munich: 1955), p. 211. "Jedenfalls hat es einen Baumcult im alten Griechenland gegeben; ich mochte sogar vermuten, da er unter der Landbevolkerung viel allgemeiner und starker verbreitet war, als Zeugnisse uns vermuten lassen."

[3]ibid., p. 210.

I

INTRODUCTION: THE SACRED TREE IN THE GREEK WORLD

In the ancient world, as indeed in modern primitive cultures, examples of nature worship abound. The less developed a religion, the more it is concerned with the creative and regenerative power of Nature. And in most cases, closely allied with nature worship is the veneration of the sacred tree. Despite the obscuring trappings of the more sophisticated mythologies, even at the very pinnacle of religious evolution, we find reference to the tree cult. Neither the highly polished religious systems of the Classical world, nor the "modern" creeds of Islam or Christianity are exceptions to this.

Nowhere is the full flowering of mythology more apparent than in the truly anthropomorphic and complex religion of the ancient Greeks. Here the wealth of later myth all but hides the actual origins of belief. But the local deities of more rustic areas, such as Arcadia and Laconia's isolated villages, betray their derivation by the very primitive, darker side to their natures, a side not in keeping with the more elevated characters of the Olympian gods.

Sir Arthur Evans, in his often-quoted article on the Minoan and Mycenean tree and pillar cults discusses the difficulty of obtaining a clear and cohesive picture of the character of prehistoric belief in the Greek world:

> On the whole . . . the remains of the primitive form of worship in Classical Greece and Italy are too much overlaid and obscured by the later anthropomorphic tendencies to reproduce the vital spirit otherwise than fitfully and inadequately.[1]

Thus, in order to analyze the prehistoric rites and cultic beliefs of the Greek world, it is necessary to search out clues to the underlying stratum of primitive worship which survived into the religion of the Classical period and later. One of the most common and intriguing elements in later belief which most clearly betrays its origin in early animism is the veneration of the sacred tree. The tree cult is suprisingly long-lived and universal in its recognition as a religious motif, and as an important factor in the evolving religious consciousness of the Greek-speaking peoples, Therefore, the tree cult may be examined as a key to the mythopoeic tradition which was the characteristic religious expression of the ancient Greeks. It is a link between pre-historic and Classical religion, and the very longevity of the motif attests to its intrinsic significance within the Greek conceptual image of the divine.

The major problem inherent in any attempt to trace religious symbolism and cultic ritual from the literary and artistic sources available from the Classical period to their primitive animistic origins is the difficulty in penetrating the cloud of silence which hangs over Dark Age Greece. Yet, there is little doubt that it was in that period when most of the influences and concepts affecting later Greek religion

were adopted and developed.

The tree cult was a fundamental aspect of Minoan-Mycenean nature worship; this is obvious from the numerous artistic representations of the Bronze Age showing the tree in a sacral context.[2] It is generally accepted that the interplay of the cultures of Minoan Crete and the Mycenean peoples of the mainland included influence in religion, and that this influence affected the later Greek attitude towards the divine to a large degree. It is impossible to ascertain the actual extent of this influence upon the Greeks because of the paucity of our information regarding the mythology and ritual of the Bronze Age religious systems. The exact nature of the worship is as yet unknown, but it is clear from the archaeological and artistic sources, at least, that the focus of the belief was the potency of the Life force, as embodied in the goddess of earthly fertility, the Mother Goddess. She was representative of Earth, and presided over all vegetal and faunal reproduction. Her associate was the seasonal god, the youthful consort of the Mother Goddess, presumable inferior in power, and sometimes called the "Cretan Zeus".[3]

That there existed amongst the inhabitants of the mainland who were relatively unaffected by the hegemony of the Mycenean kings a rudimentary form of worship which also included the tree cult is suggested by the existence of the curious oracle of the oak-Zeus at Dodona. The antiquity of this cult, in an isolated region of Epirus, is attested by the tradition that the oracle was once visited by Deucalion, the Greek equivalent

of Noah.[4] Even Homer seems puzzled by the strange behavior of the priests of that cult, for he comments upon their primitive rites and customs in the Iliad.[5] It has been suggested that the original shrine at this site once belonged to a female deity associated with the oak tree, and that the worship of Zeus there was a later addition. Certainly the later cult considered not Hera, but a little-known lady called Dione to be his consort at that site.[6]

The basis of the theory is the contention that the so-called 'invaders' from the north who entered Greece at the beginning of the Dark Ages, and mingled with the indigenous inhabitants, brought with them their own religious system; this consisted of a patriarchal, astrally-oriented faith, centred about the figure of the masculine sky-god, Zeus. Despite controversy regarding the actual dates and mechanics of such a religious synthesis, it seems certain that Zeus, together with many of the male sky-deities of Germany and Scandanavia, to whom he is related, was closely associated with a particular species of tree, the oak. As Vermeule tells us, with certain reservations, the usual view of scholars on the subject is that the northern patriarchal system, developed to suit the needs of nomadic pastoral peoples, gradually gained precedence over the ancient religion of Greece and her islands, a religion which had focused upon a female fertility deity as supreme divinity.[7] Thus, Dodona would represent a synthesis of the two systems of belief. That the oak was sacred to the pagan high god of ancient Germany is attested by the description of one Erasmus Stella of an oracle

from a holy oak which was still extant in sixteenth century Prussia.[8]

It is, of course, impossible to assess the nature and extent of northern influence upon Greek religion. However, one may safely state that in the southern area of the Greek mainland, where northern influence is least likely to have had a profound effect upon indigenous culture, the instances of tree worship bear a far more intimate relationship to the old, maternally-focused nature religion of the Minoan and Mycenean peoples. This is particularly true of those cults centred about the female deities of the Olympic pantheon, although the distinction is by no means exclusive.[9] The most ancient cult centres whose worship included the veneration of the tree tend to be those whose foundations date to Mycenean times. Mycenean remains have come to light at such sites as the Spartan Menelaion, which was the shrine for the worship of Helen throughout the Classical period, at the Delphic temple of Apollo, at Amyklai, the shrine of Apollo and an old prehellenic vegetation god, Hyakinthos, and at the temple of Athena on the Acropolis of Mycenae itself.[10]

> Where, as in a few of the most ancient sanctuaries of Greece the old tree and stone worship still held its own, it is interesting to notice that this phenomenon generally coincided with the survival of the early ethnic stratum that has most claim to represent, in part, at least, the old Mycenean element.[11]

The problem of the possibility of cult continuity from the Bronze Age through the Dark Ages in Greece is a thorny one, and one better dealt with elsewhere. For the

interpretations superimposed upon primitive religion by modern scholarship, one finds, at the very heart of worship, the obvious. Primitive man, - and in this category I include both ancient and modern primitive cultures - living at first a hand-to-mouth existence as a semi-nomadic hunter-gatherer, and later relying upon small-scale agricultural ventures and animal husbandry for his livelihood, has as his primary preoccupation, religious or otherwise, the continued and abundant fertility of his food source. The power of Nature, the dynamic force of Life in all its manifestations, which ensured this was thus the primary object of veneration. And the largest and longest living example of the potency of Nature in the realm of vegetation is the tree. It is closest to the sky, yet rooted in earth. It sheds its leaves in autumn, only to grow them again in spring, or else retains its foliage year-round, thereby exemplifying the reassuring quality of the eternal. Trees provide shade and fruit, fuel and building materials. And a single tree has a life expectancy which spans many human generations.

Other aspects of tree worship, rituals, myths, then followed in natural progression. Ancient man viewed the cosmos in exactly the manner in which it presented itself to him; he saw it as a more-or-less flat plate, the earth, domed ever with the blue roof of the sky.[13] In his attempt to come to terms with the awesome powers present in his environment, man utilized the analogy of those aspects of life most familiar and comprehensible to him. In short, he imposed

moment, let it suffice to say that it is in the rural and isolated communities of the Greek mainland and islands that Mycenean cult survival is both best attested and most plausible. This is partly a function of the notorious religious conservatism of country folk, coupled with the relative absence of foreign influence which profoundly affected more geographically accessible regions such as Boeotia and Attica.

Before embarking upon a discussion of the tree cult as manifested in the later Greek world, it is desirable to gain some understanding of the stage of religious consciousness which might produce such a phenomenon in its most rudimentary form. The various myths, aetiological or otherwise, which describe tree worship in Greece as an adjunct to the veneration of specific members of the Olympic pantheon are largely due to the later rationalizing tendency in religious matters which was characteristic of the Greeks, especially those of the Classical period.[12] In some cases, the analysis of a particular myth serves to suggest the original form taken by various aspects of religion during its prehistoric phase. In others, the sophisticated aetia produced by Classical and Hellenistic romanticism only obscure the tree nature of early belief. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between those myths which are clearly survivals of primitive cultic tradition, and those which represent mere speculations upon religious practices and beliefs no longer fully understood on the part of a more evolved culture.

If one disregards the complexities and theological

the familiar microcosm of his own experience upon the broader realm of the cosmos itself. It was a crude method of systematizing those forces which were not truly defined in his own mind, yet regulated his very existence.

The Earth, taking in seed and giving forth all the fruits of nature, acquired a maternal character in most primitive religious systems. The female naturally would be the one fertilized and who would bear fruit in the human or animal context, and this fact was projected onto the cosmic plane. The sky above was seen as the blustering father, pouring forth at whim the seminal rains which fertilized his consort Earth, and occasionally bursting forth in an inexplicable and terrifying display of thunder and lightning.

Given such a world view, it is quite possible to imagine the significance which might be accorded the tree as a kind of microscosmic expression of the entire cycle of natural and seasonal fertility. The tall tree, with roots in Mother Earth and its leaves almost touching the sky-Father, could be seen as visible, physical proof of the sacred marriage of the two, the very sexual act itself. This union was considered necessary for the continued fertility of the Earth, and in the form known as hieros gamos was a most prevalent theme in Mediterranean nature religions.[14] The repetition of the sacred marriage between the two supreme deities of the pantheon was believed to be required to ensure the cyclic transition of the seasons; annual rites throughout Greece consisted of the symbolic re-enactment of the hieros

gamos to this end, and were variously described in cultic tradition as the marriage of Zeus and Hera, Iasion and Demeter, and so on.

Closely tied in with the tree cult is the motif of the sacred spring or font. Water is naturally connected to fertility in religious imagery, and frequently we find in the Greek world reference to a sacred tree or grove in conjunction with a holy water source. The holy olive of Athena, together with the spring of Poseidon on the Athenian acropolis, is an example of the combination of the two elements.[15] Many sites where the tree was venerated retained the connection with the sacred spring; the Temple of Apollo at Delphi actually was said to have a spring or font running through it, while the Dodona oak was also associated with a sacred water source.[16]

The snake, too, often appears as an adjunct to tree worship, and is intimately connected with earthly fertility. It is to be seen together with the tree-spring combination of motifs in many primitive religions from a variety of places. Again, the Athenian acropolis bears out this statement in the association of Erichthonius, the snake, with the olive of Athena, and with the spring of Poseidon.[17]

An extension of tree worship occurs in the veneration of the sacred pillar, the maybough, or of the or βρέτας of a god. This latter was, in effect, a rough-hewn image or plank of wood representing the deity to whom the tree was dedicated. It belongs to a phase of Greek

religion preceding the portrayal of the gods in anthropomorphic form, as in the more sophisticated cult statues familiar from the Classical and Hellenistic periods.[18] It was frequently fashioned from the wood of the tree sacred to the god, and on occasion continued to be venerated side by side with later cult images as an object of great holiness; often it was thought that such aniconic images were given by the deity in question, rather than having been made by man. Thus, there are several surviving myths relating how a ξόανον was "found" by members of a community in some primeval period, and henceforth worshipped in accordance with the god's request.[19]

The use of the bough to represent the inherent potency of the tree from which it is cult was common in ancient religious practice, and is still evident in the use of mayboughs in European Spring festivals today. It was considered to have the property of bringing indoors the fertilizing power of the season. In ancient ritual, the bough was utilized in the propitiation of certain gods. For instance, in the rites of Zeus at Mount Lykaion in Arcadia, the bough of the oak was dipped in the holy spring of the god in order to obtain rain.[20] However, the sanctity of such a branch, severed from the living tree, was considered only temporary, the bough being discarded as soon as the rite or festival was concluded.

Different species of tree seem to have had varying cultic significance. The unchanging foliage of the evergreen

types was for ancient man symbolic of the continued regenerative power of Nature. The cycle of the seasons, on the other hand, representing the alternate suppression and unleashing of the dynamic potency of Life was symbolized by the deciduous varieties, specifically the poplar, all of them sacred to the young rising-and-dying god common in the religious systems of the ancient peoples of the lands bordering the Mediterranean. The fig was considered the holy tree of Dionysus, who was believed to have introduced it to mankind. Because of this attribute, he was accorded the epithet Συκίτης in Lakonia.[21] The trilobed leaf of the fig, and the peculiar shape of the fruit, which resembles the female reproductive organs, were recognized throughout the Near East as representative of the two greatest powers in the cosmos - the combination of the male and female powers of reproduction.[22]

The pine and its cone, almost universally considered a symbol of fertility sacred to the chthonic powers, was thought to be capable of nourishing and sustaining a person after death, a concept which betrays a very primitive level of belief indeed.[23] The cypress, with its distinctly phallic shape, was also connected with death, and was the especial attribute of the Eastern Aphrodite during the Classical period; wood from that tree adorned the entrance to her temple at Ephesus.[24]

The oak had particular significance as the attribute of the masculine sky deity, Zeus. It was also considered sacred to the Greek goddess of corn and earthly fertility, Demeter.[25] In light of this clue, one is tempted to speculate

Demeter.[25] In light of this clue, one is tempted to speculate upon the possibility of a relationship between Demeter and the goddess of the oak, Dione, consort of Zeus at the Dodonan oracle. Both ladies are certainly prehellenic in origin; Dione may have been the sole inhabitant of that cult centre before the coming of the later Greeks and their supreme male deity, Zeus. Also Eleusis, the ancient site for the worship of Demeter, is founded upon Mycenean remains.

There are multiple references to sacred trees in later Greek sources. Apollo was, of course, the god of the laurel, a tree sometimes also connected with his twin, Artemis.[26] She, of all the Olympian deities, is the goddess most often associated with the tree cult in its various manifestations in the Greek world. Her cult epithets often refer to her as the goddess of certain species of tree.[27] Athena, too, is closely allied with the sacred tree, although in her case, the tree is the olive. Pausanias remarks upon the impossibility of enumerating all the holy trees and groves in Greece in his own day.[28] Presumably the count must have been even higher in the prehistoric and early Classical periods, when every spring and grove had its own nymph or daemon.

Any picture of the actual evolution of the tree cult must needs be a speculative one, but it seems reasonable to assume that it followed a similar line of development to

that of Greek religion as a whole. However, it is to be cautioned that religious concepts do not evolve in a uniform fashion, nor are new ideas regarding old traditions readily accepted by all peoples. It is more plausible, then, that at any given date from, say, Homeric times on, the phases of the evolution of such a religious phenomenon as the tree cult represented simultaneously in different parts of the Greek world.[29] Certain cults retained their primitive character, stemming from the earliest animistic stage of their conception. Others lost all resemblance to the rites and beliefs which had been endemic to their original form.

The tree owed its popularity as an object of worship, at least in part, to the very simplicity of the concept which generated the veneration. It is evident from the very ubiquity of the tree cult throughout the world that the image of the tree strikes a chord deep in the religious psyche of the human race. The multiple instances of tree worship, and the rites and myths connected with such veneration, vary enormously from culture to culture. But the motif remains, a symbol originally of vegetal fertility, and later acquiring a plethora of expressions as the religions of which it was a part evolved in their individual ways. The tree occurs in a sacral context from Sweden to the Sudan, and from South America to China. Its survival despite the sophistication and the mythologizing tendencies inherent in the more developed religious systems, including those of the Classican world, attests to its unique appeal. There is no doubt that

the tree possessed such an attraction for the ancient Greeks.

Dietrich discusses in general terms the survival of primitive motifs and concepts in more developed religious systems:

> Religion has always been the most conservative force which binds together a society through political vicissitude and times of national disaster. Many aspects of Classical Greek religion, many rites, cultic practices, many festivals and gods suggest the survival of inherited traditions, the continuation of divine figures and beliefs through centuries of adverse fortunes.[30]

Later on in his book, The Origins of Greek Religion, that author states:

> One must also bear in mind that any religion which hopes to capture popular imagination and endure for any length of time must make use of older and existing beliefs, such as had been acceptable to every worshipper for many generations.[31]

The very longevity of the motif of the sacred tree in Greek religion is proof that it fulfilled the above-stated requirements for cultic survival in a changing social milieu.

The actual evolution of the tree cult follows a pattern characteristic of the development of nature motifs in later religions, religions transformed by the changes in human thought and need brought about by the process which we call civilization. In general, this revers to the development of an urban-oriented social structure within an urban context. It is a function of this urbanizing process that the more sophisticated mythological and eschatological systems must

ultimately subvert, or at least transform, to suit new needs, the primitive religious precepts and rites which had served the agricultural or pastoral society of their ancestors. Conversely, people inhabiting rural areas are subject both to less influence on the part of foreign cultures with which an urban society might come into contact, and have less leisure time to devote to speculation upon the subject of the divine. Thus, they retain their age-old customs and ancient rites in purer from than do their urban neighbours. This, then, would account for the more primitive cults and their attendant rituals which survived in the isolated regions of the Peloponnese for far longer than in so cosmopolitan a city as Athens.

If we accept that the earliest religion of Greece was, as is true of most other early cultures, a form of primitive animism focused upon the creative and regenerative potency of Nature, then the tree cult is a natural element of such worship. There is no doubt that such a statement applies to the religions of Bronze Age Greece and Crete. We have already noted the environmental and socio-economic factors which may have produced such worship on the part of the early inhabitants of Greece. In the development of a religious motif such as the sacred tree, there are a series of stages which correspond to the evolving religious consciousness of the society. The tree would have a different significance at the earliest phase of animism, than it would to subsequent generations of believers.

At this primary stage, the term "symbol" should not be applied to the tree. Rather than representing a divine being, the god simply was the tree; that is, there was no separation in the minds of the worshippers between the tree at which they made offerings to their god, and the god himself. Symbolism, on the other hand, implies the ability to think in metaphorical or allegorical terms, rather a sophisticated psychological development, and one not characteristic of what Frankfort would term "pre-logical" thought.[32] The tree acquired its sacral nature in primitive religion, not because it "symbolized" the god to whom it was sacred, but because it was seen as , in and of itself, a physical embodiment of the dynamic creative force of Nature. The later separation of the sacred tree from the god was a development out of this crude but powerful concept.[33]

The next stage is what Hastings calls the "representative" phase in the cult of the tree.[34] The evolving Greeks began to become aware of the distinction between the tree itself, and the deity with whom it was so intimately connected. The gods were developing distinct personalities and more clearly defined spheres of influence. The old tie with the holy tree remained, however; the god was now said to dwell in the tree which was associated with him. For instance, at Dodona, Zeus and Dione were believed to live, not on Olympus, but in the roots of the holy oak whence came the oracle.[35] The presence of the divinity in the tree, though, might be either temporary or permanent.

Both Persson and Evans maintain that the tree was the site for the epiphany of a god or goddess, a concept which recalls the Biblical equivalent of the burning bush. They also suggest that the continual association of the tree with various species of bird may be explained in this light.[36] Homer portrays Athena and Apollo as visiting the plain of Troy in the form of vultures, resting in the oak tree of their father Zeus which stood there.[37] There are certainly many Minoan and Mycenean representations of the bird in conjunction with the holy tree in art, while Zeus, himself curiously related to a Minoan deity of the rising-and-dying variety called Velchanos, is said to have consorted with certain of his ladies in bird form. The ladies in question seem clearly related to the cult of the sacred tree; Zeus came to Hera in the form of a cuckoo, and to Leda as a swan.[38]

Characteristic of the representative phase of tree worship is the placement of a rudimentary image of the god associated with that tree in or under it. These were the βρέτας or ξόανον mentioned earlier, and were often fashioned of the wood of the same holy tree.[39] In the case of the cult of Hera or Samos, Pausanias tells us that a rough plank of wood which had stood for the goddess in the pre-historic period still in his day stood beside the fully anthropomorphic statue of Classical date by Smilis in the sanctuary, and was considered very holy. It was even at that late date yet accorded the ancient rituals.[40] Such

placement of an image in or under a sacred tree (in the case of Hera, the ξοανον was tied to the lygos, the holy tree of the goddess) indicates that the ties between the tree and the god were still very strong, and that for some reason, it was considered necessary to reaffirm the relationship periodically.

Many scholars hold the view that the tree was actually the original shrine at which the deities were worshipped, before the building of temples. The outdoor shrines of the Myceneans, evident in glyptic art, would certainly support this theory, as would the references to the placement of aniconic images of certain goddesses in or near their sacred trees, as in the case of Artemis of Ephesus. That goddess was worshipped at the foot of her holy oak, as we are told by Callimachus. There is also a coin extant of Myrrha showing her in the branches of her tree being approached on either side by woodcutters, while the tree is protected by snakes.[41] White describes the first temple as a <u>temenos</u> and sacred grove, the sanctity of the site preceding the building of the official temple on it.[42] Of course, it is obvious that sacred places were in existence before temples were constructed, and even the first temples themselves must have been rudimentary affairs, if we are to believe the archaeological evidence. The Heraion at Samos seems to have consisted of nothing more than a large lygos tree and a stone altar in the earliest phase of worship at that site.[43]

The last clearly defined stage in tree worship was

was the so-called "symbolic" phase.[44] The original crude gods of local cult were gradually transformed through a variety of influences into the fully anthropomorphic and developed deities of Olympian stature, and were synthesized into the religious complex of Homeric tradition. Images of the gods portrayed youthful and perfect beings, rather than the rough wooden planks or hermes of the earlier period. The tree now was truly a symbol of the god, a prominent attribute in his worship, which could occasionally stand for him. If one were to show an olive tree to an Athenian of the fourth century, he would immediately tell you that it stood for the goddess Athena. Myths grew up, or were developed out of earlier ones which connected the gods with their particular species of tree. But the old, intimate tie between tree and god was gone.

The associating of the holy tree with a god was, however, retained in old myths, local cult, in the oral tradition, and in the many cultic epithets attached to the names of the gods which betrayed their original connection with the tree cult. Some of these titles continued in use for centuries, and found their way into the literary material of later ages. Artemis is Kedreatis, Karyatis, and Lygodesma, Hera, too, is Lygodesma, which means "bound with the fronds of the lygos tree", and refers to certain rites carried out in her honour at the Samian site for her worship.[45] On the island of Rhodes, Helen is called δενδρίτης , and there remains a tradition that she was hanged from a tree in that place. Dionysus bears a similar cult epithet,

for he is the god of all trees, and especially of those which bear fruit. Apollo had several epithets which connect him with the holy laurel tree, while Asclepius is at Orchomenos known by the title Ἀγνίτας and at Sparta Κυπάρισσος .[46] De Visser has compiled in his book, Die Nicht Menschengestaltigen Gotter, a comprehensive list of Classical and later references to the tree cult contained in cult titles of the various deities of the Greek pantheon.[47]

The epithets connecting the gods with sacred trees reveal in themselves the longevity of the tradition which provides for the association. Many are recorded by Pausanias, a fact which attests that the tradition, at least, lasted well into the Roman period. Interestingly, other material regarding tree worship in Greece comes from the writings of the Church Fathers, who complain bitterly about the difficulty they encountered when they attempted to eradicate pagan rituals carried out about holy trees in rural areas of Greece.[48] However, despite the survival of cult epithets and scattered rites which were allied to tree worship, it is evident that even by the Classical period, the initial reasons for the association between trees and the gods had largely been forgotten, or else had simply lost their significance to the more developed culture of that date.

It is for this reason that we find the invention taking place of aetiological myths which explain the connection between a god and a particular holy tree or grove. Some of the tales which grew up about the later tree cult bore no relation to the original form of nature worship of which the

sacred tree had been so fundamental a part.

In later Greek mythology are to be found such stories as that of the metamorphosis of Daphne into the laurel, as a defence against the amorous advances of the god Apollo. A similar story, this time about Pitys, accounts for the connection of Pan with the pine tree.[49] The myth of Cyparissus explains the association between Apollo and the cypress tree, for the boy Cyparissus was transformed by the god into that tree so that he might eternally mourn his unwitting murder of his friend, the stag of Carthea.[50] Finally, Zeus rewards the unknowing hospitality to him on the part of Philemon and Baucis by offering them immortality, he in the form of an oak, and his wife taking the shape of the linden tree.[51]

As stated earlier, the deities whose ties to the tree cult seem strongest amongst the Olympian deities, Zeus aside, are those with the closest connection to the Minoan and Mycenean nature divinities. Aetia also explain the association of such goddesses as Athena and Artemis with their particular species of tree.

Athena is continually associated with the olive, a fact which found mythopoetic expression in the tale of the contest between that goddess and Poseidon for possession of the Athenian acropolis. The myth of Erichthonius deals with the snake, also an important attribute of Athena at this site. Thus, the three motifs are accounted for, the tree-spring-snake combination which was characteristic of Bronze Age Greek religion in regard to the tree cult and the worship of the Mother Goddess. There is little doubt that Athena

was herself descended from the old Mycenean goddess of palace and war, special protectress of kings. The tree, the snake, and the spring were all attributes of that lady as well.[52] In addition, the Mycenean court was the centre for manufacturing and economic activity; Athena was the patron deity of craftsmen.[53]

Artemis is generally considered to have descended from the old πότνια θηρῶν. The Mistress of the Animals of Minoan and Mycenean date. She was the goddess of faunal fertility, although in Classical mythology chaste herself, and is continually allied with tree worship, especially in the Peloponnese. At Karyae, Artemis was worshipped as the goddess of the nut tree, and Nilsson maintains that the town itself received its name because it was the site for her worship in this guise.[54] The dance was a particular aspect of the cult rituals surrounding the figure of Artemis as she was venerated as goddess of her various sacred trees.

In addition to examples of tree worship which were the legacy of Minoan and Mycenean cultural influence upon the later Greeks, elements of Near Eastern religious tradition in this regard also crept into Classical myth. Two stories particularly betray their foreign origins - the tale of Attis and Cybele and that of Aphrodite and Adonis. Attis is identified with both the pine and the almond, while Adonis was born of the myrrh tree, and in death is connected with the cypress.[55] Both are youthful seasonal gods of vegetation, destined to be born and die with the spring and autumn deaths of the crops and flowers. They are tied into the Eastern

cults of the Mother Goddess, Cybele being the Phrygian great goddess, and Aphrodite the maternal fertility deity of the Eastern Greeks.

Apart from the many aetia of Classical mythology which deal with the association between the deities of Olympic stature and the sacred tree, there exist in Greek literature many instances of the tree cult found in less exalted contexts. There are tales of nymphs and dryads who inhabit sacred groves, trees planted by heroes or priests, trees which mark the graves of various figures of mythic fame, and so on, including the myriad stories of metamorphoses into trees. These survive in local legend and cult, and there also occur hints of strange rituals and primitive beliefs in connection with the various daemons, nymphs, and rustic manifestations of the different gods and goddesses.

Common religious motifs are to be found again and again, whose primitive and sometimes bloody origins one may only guess at. One such rite is that of the hanging of the goddess or her priestess from the holy tree. Whether this practice, applied to images, or, at worst, to sacrificial animals, in the later period, originated in a form of human sacrifice associated with the tree cult is an open question. Another curious tradition refers to the chaining or binding of the goddess. Merkelbach has demonstrated that this motif usually occurs in conjunction with tree goddesses, although that aspect of the cult may be obscured in the later worship.[56]

Dancing about the sacred tree of a deity was a common feature of late cult practice, and was intimately tied in with tree veneration and the propitiation of the powers of natural fertility. Finally, one finds in ancient sources repeated injunctions against injury done to sacred trees. The cutting of a tree belonging to a divinity frequently carried the death sentence, and the marking or damaging of holy trees was considered to arouse the wrath of the god or goddess to whom they belonged.[57] Such odd aspects of tree worship are to be found again and again in material dealing with the more primitive cults of ancient Greece. These are, of course, not all the rites connected with the veneration of trees in later cult, but do merit individual consideration, since these traditions survived throughout the ancient period, and were strong in several local centres of worship in mainland Greece and the islands. They are derived from tree worship in its most rudimentary form, yet survive in later cult to an almost astonishing degree, considering the crudity of the conceptual framework from which such rites sprang.

Notes to Pages 1 to 24

[1]Sir Arthur Evans, "The Mycenean Tree and Pillar Cult and its Mediterranean Relations". J.H.S. XXI (1901), p. 130.

[2]Reynold Higgins, Minoan and Mycenean Art (London: 1967), p. 186f. Ill. no. 238 shows a seal from Knossos portraying the curious motif of a sacred tree apparently growing out of a small shrine which one finds repeatedly in Bronze Age art. See also nos. 239, 240.

[3]M.P. Nilsson, The Minoan-Mycenean Religion and its Survival in Greek Art 2nd ed. (New York: 1971), pp. 551-555; Alexiou Stylianos, Minoan Civilization, trans. by Cressida Ridley, 2nd ed. (Heraclion: n.d.), p. 71f; Emily Vermeule, Greece in the Bronze Age (Chicago: 1964), p. 19. It is clear from the numerous female images of the steatopygos type uncovered throughout Greece that the religion of that country, and indeed, of the whole Near East, was relatively uniform during the Neolithic period. The link between the agricultural revolution of that date and the emphasis of popular religion is evident.

[4]H.W. Parke, The Oracles of Zeus (Oxford: 1967), p. 40.

[5]Homer, Iliad 16:233ff.

[6]Vermeule, p. 19. "...the oldest cult centre in Greece specifically linked to the Pelasgian, Dodona in Espeiros, possessed a primitive prophetic ritual to which the Greek Zeus was definitely a late intruder and which struck even the most liberal Greeks as blindly archaic."; Evi Melas, Temples and Sanctuaries of Ancient Greece (London: 1970), p. 155. Melas considers the Dodona cult to represent a purely northern tradition, as opposed to the opinion of Vermeule and others.

[7]Vermeule, p. 280. She expresses this theory as the one generally accepted by scholars, although she adds her own reservations and hypotheses. She also protests against the wholesale equation of Minoan and Mycenean religious systems. However, for the purpose of this study, any attempt to separate those instances of tree worship in later Greek religion stemming from Minoan influence from those originating in Mycenean religious practice would be both impossible and irrelevant. It is, rather, the survival of cult motifs from the Bronze Age, through the Dark Ages, and on into Classical and Hellenistic worship which fundamentally affects the tone of our argument here.

[8]Parke, p. 22.

[9]H.J. Rose, Primitive Culture in Greece (London: 1925), p. 65; W. Burkert, Homo Necans: Interpretationen altgriechischer Opferriten und Mythen, p. 467 (Delphi), p. 471 (Menelaion), p. 470 (Amyklai); V.R. Desborough, The Greek Dark Ages (London: 1972), p. 280. Desborough maintains that there is no interruption in worship at Amyklai, despite an apparent break in archaeological evidence.; Jacquetta Hawkes, The Dawn of the Gods (Toronto: 1968), p. 34. (The worship of Athena at Athens).

[11]Evans, p. 127.

[12]Nilsson, Geschichte, pp. 211-222.

[13]H. and H.A. Frankfort, "Myth and Reality" in Before Philosophy (Baltimore: 1971), pp. 26-29.

[14]M.P. Nilsson, The History of Greek Religion, trans. by F.J. Fielden, 2nd ed. (Oxford: 1949), p. 94. Nilsson mentions that the sacred tree as a fertility symbol was present at ordinary marriages in the form of the holy bough. p. 33

Nilsson mentions the mythical marriages of Zeus, with Europa at Gortyn under an evergreen plane tree, and with Hera at Knossos in similar circumstances. He describes a coin of Europa and Zeus in which is portrayed Zeus coming to his bride, who is seated in the tree, in the form of an eagle. Hera was seduced by Zeus when he took the shape of a cuckoo. The bird epiphany of a deity, and the attendant association of the bird and sacred tree motifs, is particularly Minoan. See C. Boetticher, Der Baumcultus der Hellenen (Berlin: 1856), fig. 46 for illustration of the Zeus-Europa coin.

[15]Witness the cameo illustrated by Elizabeth Goldsmith, Ancient Pagan Symbols (New York: 1929), fig. 69. It shows the conjunction of the snake-tree-water motifs as contained in the mythical contest between Athena and Poseidon on the Athenian Acropolis. For the source of this illustration she cites Babelon, Cabinet des Medailles, pl. xxvi.

[16]Brigitta Berquist, The Archaic Greek Temenos (Lund: 1967), p. 107.

[17]Boetticher, p. 204; Nilsson, History of Greek Religion, p. 27. He discusses the connection between Athena and her sacred olive, the snake, her transformation into birds in Homer as evidence of her origin in Minoan religion.

[18]Ludolf Malten, "Motivgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Sagenforschung", Hermes 1939, p. 199. Boetticher, p. 217.

[19]Scholiast on Callimachus' Hymn to Diana 245 mentions that the colonists of Miletus found an oak and made the of Artemis Clutona out of it (Boetticher, p. 242); Also, the image of Artemis Orthia was discovered in a bed of osiers near Sparta, Pausanias 3:16:11; Hermes of Epeios was found by fishermen and subsequently worshipped, Nilsson Geschichte, p. 82; The xoanon of Apollo was supposed to have been stolen by barbarians, and later washed up on the coast at Delion, where it was worshipped, Pausanias 4:23:2.

[20]Pausanias 8:38:4; Nilsson, History of Greek Religion, p. 94. He maintains that the sacred qualities of the tree could be transferred to the worshippers by a touch of the holy bough.

[21]Goldsmith, p. 13; For Dionysus see M.P. Nilsson, Greek Folk Religion (New York: 1940), p. 35, and J.G. Frazer, The Golden Bough pt. 7, vol. 1 (New York: 1935), pp. 3-4. There are in addition many examples of Classical and later art where the god is portrayed seated or standing as a pole clothed in garments, and with foliage sprouting from the pillar. Boetticher, figs. 42-44.

[22]Goldsmith, p. 20.

[23]A. de Vries, Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery (London: 1974, reprint of 1914 ed.), p. 475.

[24]ibid., p. 125

[25]Arthur P. Cook, "Zeus, Jupiter and the Oak", Classical Review 17, p. 273.

[26]Pausanias 3:24:8; M.W. De Visser, Die Nicht Menschen gestaltigen Gotter der Griechen (leiden: 1903), List of epithets.

[27]Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 448. She is called Kedreatis, Karyatis, Phakelitis, Lygodesma, and so on.

[28]Pausanias 8:23:5.

[29]Malten, p. 199.

[30]B.C. Dietrich, The Origins of Greek Religion (New York: 1974), p. ix.

[31]ibid., p. 2.

[32]Frankfort, p. 14ff.

[33]Malten, pp. 199-200.

[34]James Hastings, ed., Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, vol. XII (New York: 1922), p. 448.

[35]Homer, Iliad 16:233:-234.

[36]Evans, p. 105; Axel Persson, The Religion of Greece in Prehistoric Times (Berkely and Los Angeles: 1942), p. 7; Nilsson, Minoan-Mycenean Religion, p. 284; Nilsson, History of Greek Religion, p. 34.

[37]Homer, Iliad 7:54ff.

[38]Evans, p. 163; Nilsson, Histroy of Greek Religion, p. 34. Cites Gortyn coin of Zeus and Europa in hieros gamos scene. Europa appears to have been one of the many Bronze Age vegetation goddesses.

[39]Malten, p. 200; Boetticher, p. 217 mentions that the use of holy wood was sometimes foregone in favor of more durable varieties; he cites the example of the of Artemis of Ephesus, which was made of cedar.

[40]Pausanias 7:4:4.

[41]Callimachus 2:239; Malten, p. 199; ibid., p. 198 cites coin of Myrrha.

[42]K.D. White, "The Sacred Grove", Greece and Rome (1954), p. 114; Boetticher, p. 10. Also cites Pliny NH 12.2.

[43]Hans Walter, Das Heraion Von Samos (Zurich: 1976), Plan, p. 35.

[44]Hastings, p. 448.

[45]See chapters on Artemis and Hera; Artemis Karyatis, Pausanias 3:10:6; Kedreatis, Pausanias 8:13:2; Lygodesma, Pausanias 3:16:11.

[46]Hesychius s.v., Dionysus; Pausanias 3:14:7, Asclepius; C.I.G. 1 3205, after De Visser, p. 117.

[47]ibid., De Visser.

[48]Boetticher, p. 11 quotes St. Cyril on Isaiah cf. Artemis Soteira in Boeotia; Also p. 60 mentions a comment of St. Augustine's, de. temp. serm. 241.

[49]d'Vries, p. 186.

[50]Ovid, Metam. 10:106ff.

[51]ibid., 8:620ff.

[52]Hawkes, p. 24; Nilsson, Histroy of Greek Religion, p. 27.

[53]Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 486; Stylianos, p. 73; Jane E. Harrison, Epilogomena to the Study of Greek Religion and Themis (New York: 1962, reprint of the 1921 and 1927 eds., respectively), p. 171.

[54]Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 486.

[55]Frazer, vol. 1 pt. 2, pp. 230-231.

[56]Reinhold Merkelbach, "The Girl in the Rosebush; a Turkish Tale and its roots in Ancient Ritual", HSCP (1978), p. 1.

[57]Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, Dictionaire des Symbols (Paris: 1969), p. 102; De Visser, p. 10.

II

COMMON MOTIFS ASSOCIATED WITH THE TREE CULT

One of the most common themes found in connection with the tree cult is that of hanging. This may pertain to the hanging or swinging of a person, the image of a deity, or to the suspension of sacred objects or offerings from the branches of the tree sacred in the worship of that particular divinity. The former concept probably takes its origin from a primitive fertility rite in which swinging was practised in order to propitiate those powers which regulate the growth and prosperity of crops. It is, for instance, a normal part of the Mayday celebrations of some European countries, where the branches of the sacred tree play so large a role in the planting festivities. The custom of hanging offerings and the like from the branches of holy trees is one which is very widespread; in the ancient Greek world, it included the hanging of garlands in honour of the god or goddess of the tree in many of the local cults. Sacrificial animals were suspended from trees in honour of the Eastern Aphrodite at Troy, and at the Arcadian centre for the worship of Artemis, at Kondylea, the goddess herself was hanged in effigy.

The hanging motif may well be allied with the phase of tree worship whereby the tree is thought of as embodying or containing the god. The attachment of offerings may also

be the primitive counterpart of the common rite of dressing up the image of the goddess. This was done, for instance, in the cult of Hera or Samos, and in the Panathenaia festival at Athens.[1] It is also probable that certain of the sacred objects suspended from the branches of such trees possessed an apotropaic significance, protecting the holy trees from evil of all kinds.[2] Masks were often utilized for this purpose; at Rome, masks were normally hung on the trees during the planting, and in the cult of Athena at Athens, gorgonaia and owls were suspended from the sacred olive tree of that goddess.[3] Votive offerings, too, were hung from trees, as was the case in the worship of Zeus on Crete, at the black poplar under which the god was said to have been born.[4]

There are several traditions in which the goddess is herself considered to have at one time been hanged from the tree sacred to her. This may have been annually reenacted utilizing a puppet or image of the deity in cultic rite. The best documented instance of the hanging motif occurs in the cult of Artemis ἀπαγχομένη at Kaphyae in Arcadia. Pausanias records the late aetiological myth which sought to explain this curious ritual:

> Some children . . . were playing round the sanctuary and found a rope: they tied this rope round the neck of the statue and said that Artemis was hanged. The Kaphyans discovered what the children had done and stoned them to death: as soon as they had carried out the execution, their women contracted a disease and their unborn children dropped dead out of the womb, until the reply of the Pythian priestess came that they must bury the children and burn annual offerings to them, because they had died unjustly. The Kaphyans

> still carry out the commands of the oracle to this day, and they have called the goddess Hanging Artemis ever since, as they say the same oracle commanded.[5]

This passage contains several points of interest, for, late though the myth may be, it bears echos of a more primitive and less complex stratum of religious belief in connection with the worship of Artemis as a tree goddess. The aetion clearly displays a probably Hellenistic romanticism in its use of children to explain the origin of the ritual of the hanging of the goddess. But it is certain that the tradition of the hanged Artemis, together with the injunction that this must be annually reenacted, was a very strong one at Kaphyae, and continued into the Roman period, when the account of Pausanias was written. Also, the virgin huntress of Classical myth cannot be totally identified with the powers represented by Artemis in this cult. Here, the goddess is the old

of prehellenic cult. She is the goddess of animal and human fertility, and protectress of their young; both functions are evident in this myth, for she expresses her anger at the townsfolk for killing innocent children by in turn destroying their unborn infants. Indeed, there is a hint in the myth that possibly the children's action had been originally prompted by the goddess in the first place. Only the old Mistress of the Animals would have such close ties with human reproduction.

The aetion was also recounted by Callimachus, as we are told by Clement of Alexandria.[6] It is clearly an attempt to account for the hanging motif so strongly attached to the

figure of the goddess Artemis at that cult centre. The old prehellenic tree goddess seems here, in this isolated region of the Peloponnese, to have had more in common with the characteristics of Artemis as a fertility deity than with those of the chaste and winsome huntress of later myth. Artemis is in Southern Greece also closely allied with the goddess of childbirth, Eileithyia.[7]

It is of special interest to note that Menelaus, husband of Helen, had a spring and holy plane near the shrine of the Hanging Artemis at Kaphyae.[8] Helen, too, was a tree goddess in whose mythology appears the hanging motif. She was worshipped on Thodes as Helen δενδρίτης , whence comes the myth in this regard recounted by Pausanias. He tells us that Helen, after the death of Menelaus, sought refuge on Rhodes with Polyxo, whose husband, Tleptolemos, had died at Troy. Polyxo secretly held Helen responsible for the Trojan War, and so, in order to avenge her husband's death, ordered her slavewomen to dress as Furies, and hang Helen from a tree.[9] It was in this guise that Helen was worshipped on Rhodes.

The character of Ariadne has much in common with the Helen presented in the myths. Ariadne, too, was probably originally a minor vegetation and fertility deity, and, like Helen, was raped by Theseus. She was subsequently hanged on the island of Naxos, according to the version of the myth recorded by Plutarch.[10]

Another example of a hanging motif in connection with a tree deity is the festival of Dionysus celebrated at Athens.

This was the Aiora, or Swinging, Festival. This annual rite entailed the hanging of puppets, said to represent Erigone, from a tree. The associated myth tells the story of that lady, a priestess of Dionysus, and the daughter of Icarius, who was the first man to whom Dionysus gave the secret of viticulture. Icarius gave some wine to a group of shepherds, who, thinking he had poisoned them, killed him. Erigone, in grief, hanged herself from the branches of the tree under which her father was buried.[11] The festival was a part of the spring celebrations at Athens, where the people offered the first fruits of the vintage to Icarius and Erigone, and hung puppets on the sacred tree in their honour.[12] Frazer considered this to have been a purificatory ritual, but, in light of other instances of swinging such as are found in European planting festivals, it would seem more likely that the ritual was a part of the propitiation of the powers of fertility, which had provided the means whereby the seed would flourish and bear fruit, and which were embodied in, or at least represented by, the tree sacred to the god.[14]

The actual hanging of the tree goddess, as stated, probably has its origin in the practice of attaching the image of the deity to whom the tree was sacred to its branches, in this case using the puppet of Erigone, for instance, as in the Athenian festival, rather than a ξοανον .[15] Oddly, it does not seem to have had a counter part action in Minoan or Mycenean ritual, for there are no clear artistic examples where such a hanging motif is represented, although

there exists one seal which portrays a deer hanging from a tree, presumably as an offering to the deity associated with that tree.[16]

The hanging of offerings from trees seems to have been fairly common in Greek cultic practice. Coins of the Asiatic Greeks show sacrificial animals which apparently were killed in this fashion. This, too, was a rite used by the early Norse, who hung victims from trees in the sacred grove at Old Uppsala in honour of Odin, god of battle.[17] At Bambyke, as part of the Spring Festival, trees were set up in the precinct of the deity and then hung with clothes and living victims. These were all set afire. In coins of Tarsus, the god is represented taking part in this ritual, portrayed either sitting in his tree, or on the pyre itself.[18]

Less bloody offerings were also suspended from holy trees, such as garlands, taenia, flowers, and the like. Again we find evidence for this in the early Christian sources, for the Codex Theodosianus states that the death penalty was incurred by anyone who hung such offerings in holy groves.[19] This attests, yet again, to the longevity of the rituals associated with the tree cult. Theokritus, much earlier, records the hanging of lotus blossoms from the tree sacred to Helen,[20] and there is a description in which Lelex is mentioned in conjunction with a holy tree which he saw in Phrygia hung with garlands, and bearing a sign which said that the tree was in the care of a god, and warning dire punishment should someone injure it.[21]

The practice of hanging or swinging an object or

image from the branches of a holy tree is therefore one aspect of fertility ritual. It is particularly attached to those deities with influence in the sphere of earthly or animal fertility, the propitiation of which characterized the prehistoric religion of Greece. The tree itself was so closely allied with the god himself, that the suspension of offerings from it was thought to be the same as actually giving votives to the deity. On the other hand, the hanging of the image of a god or goddess from the tree sacred to his or her worship indicates that stage of religious evolution on the part of the Greek-speaking peoples and their mainland predecessors where the tree no longer was thought to contain the persona of the divine being. The image of the deity is attached <u>to</u> the tree; the god is not, then, <u>in</u> the tree initially. But the old sacral connection between god and tree demands the periodic reaffirmation of the physical identity of the two. That is, the mana of the tree may be, through the hanging of the image from it, transferred to that image, while, conversely, the life and sanctity of the tree is restated in terms of the attachment of the representation of the god with whom it is associated.

Another recurrent theme in regard to the tree cult is that of the binding or chaining of the image of the deity. The motif is to be found most often in connection with goddesses whose attribute is the sacred tree and who are associated with the property of fertility, although it also appears in the worship of Dionysus, a god intimately involved with

the tree cult. It was a major factor in the cults of Artemis Orthia and Hera of Samos, and will be dealt with more fully in that context in the specific chapters dealing with those cults. However, there are several other instances of the motif in Greek religion which merit individual consideration.

Merkelbach is of the opinion that the goddesses who are represented as bound or fettered tend to be those which are the chief goddesses of the city where they are so portrayed. The theory he presents is that the deities were bound in order "to keep them from running away" when the people of the city had need of them.[22] Nilsson, on the other hand, suggests that the ritual binding of the image was symbolic of the holding back of sexual desire on the part of the goddess in preparation for the hieros gamos , the sacred marriage with the god.[23] In order to assess the merit of the two hypotheses, an examination of the various examples of chained or bound deities in the Greek world would seem valid.

Artemis Orthia and Hera at her cult on Samos are both represented as bound about with the fronds of their sacred tree, the lygos, a willow-like shrub. Images of Orthia show her in the form of a ξοανον , only her head being fashioned as that of a woman, while the lower part of the image resembles a trunk or stump, marked with horizontal striations. These latter are probably inteded to represent lygos fronds.[24] Acoin of Samos shows Hera with fetters hanging from her hands, an example of the same concept.[25] Clement of Alexandria records that the image of Dionysus at Thebes consisted of a wooden column wrapped about with ivy tendrils, while the image

of Artemis Soteira was so obscured with foliage that Pausanias complains that he cannot view it properly.[26] A coin from Ephesus is extant which portrays the goddess Artemis, patron deity of that city, with a tree-like headpiece, and chains about her feet. A similar image of Aphrodite is mentioned by Nilsson, and is said to have come from Sparta.[27]

There are various other examples of such a motif in connection with tree-deities, but it would seem that neither of the explanations of theme put forward by Merkelbach or Nilsson is entirely satisfactory. Certainly, it is a function of later myth that such a deity as Artemis of Erythrai was chained so that she could not run away.[28] And the binding of Hera to her holy lygos tree with the fronds of that tree, as we shall see, does bear overtones of the hieros gamos mentioned by Nilsson. But the ritual practice of periodically typing or wrapping a barely-iconic image of a fertility deity in the foliage of the tree sacred to the divine figure suggests another possible interpretation.

In our earlier discussion of the transition from aniconic to iconic imagery in regard to deities associated with the sacred tree, it was suggested that, until such time as the god or goddess had attained fully anthropomorphic stature, and the tree had been relegated to the position of a mere symbol of divinity, the original seat of the god's potency would be regularly reaffirmed by the placement of the image of that divinity in, on, or under his holy tree. In the days before the building of elaborate temple complexes, it is generally agreed that places of worship were simple

outdoor affairs, perhaps a rudimentary shrine, centering upon a holy tree, as is suggested by the many Minoan and Mycenean representations of such cult places.[29] There would be no problem presented by the attachment of an image to a sacred tree for the above-stated ritual purpose.

With the growing affluence and sophistication of Greece in the archaic period, temples were constructed to house the images of the gods, which themselves grew more and more elaborate. The relationship between tree and god was broken in a physical sense, although the traditions recording their affinity remained.[30] Old religious concepts die hard; it is suggested, then, that the reason why the images of certain gods even in the days of Pausanias, were wrapped in the foliage of the tree or plants sacred to them, was the necessity of somehow recharging, as it were, the image with the life potency contained in the living vegetal element with which they were most closely associated. The transfer of mana through a touch is a common concept in primitive sympathetic magic. It is manifest in the Greek world in the myth of the birth of the divine twins, Artemis and Apollo. Their mother, Leto, clung to a sacred palm tree for aid in the delivery.[31] The fertilizing potency of the tree was thus passed to the mother through her physical contact with it.

One of the most frequent themes ocurring in the context of tree worship in the Greek world is that of the dance. Ecstatic or orgiastic dancing is an age-old form

of sympathetic magic performed for the purpose of aiding vegetal and faunal fertility. Violent motion, such as dancing or swinging, imitates the violence of the sexual act itself, and thus is a powerful element of primitive planting and harvest rituals. To the early Greeks, too, these rites were relevant, and they carried out such celebrations in honour of their gods of birth and harvest. The Maypole ceremonies of present day Scandanavia, Germany and England are clearly orgiastic in origin, and stem from the ancient practice of dancing about a holy tree in order to propitiate the divinities who govern the planting of crops.[32]

With the exception of the cult of Dionysus, the instances of choral and dramatic dance performed in a sacral context were usually confined to the worship of the female deities of the pantheon who were most concerned with the property of fertility. Artemis is especially connected with such ritual dance. The Bronze Age tree-and-fertility goddess depicted on so many pieces of glyptic art of that date is often portrayed surrounded by votaries engaged in what appears to be a form of ceremonial dance.[33] Artemis is most clearly her descendant. In the Greek East, too, the goddesses which bear the closest relationship in character and function to the old Mediterranean Mother Goddess are those connected with ritual dance. The image of Artemis at Perge in Pamphilia shows the deity in the form of a wooden trunk with a human head, the body of the statue being enveloped in a large cloak. The hem of the mantle is decorated with a row of dancing girls.[34]

According to Nilsson, there were two types of dance performed in the worship of the deities of the Greek pantheon; these were mime and the orgiastic. The latter was endemic to the worship of Artemis, Helen, and other female goddesses, while both types had a place in the cult practices carried out in honour of the god Dionysus.[35] In the worship of the god of wine, the term ἔκστασις was used to mean dancing as an activity which would produce a state of frenzy in the participant.

There is evidence for orgiastic dance in the cult of Artemis as she was worshipped at Sparta, but also it would seems that a form of ritual drama was enacted. Masks were worn by the dancers, as is attested by the scores of terra-cotta votive gifts in this form which were uncovered at the Orthia sanctuary.[36] A tympana was discovered near the Limnaia shrine in the same region, near the Messenian border.[37] Pausanias describes the dance of the maidens at Karyae, which was performed in honour of Artemis and her nymphs in Arcadia. It is possible that the karyatids which adorn the Porch of the Maidens in Athens had as their ancestors the same "nut maidens" who participated in the dance of Artemis Karyatis, goddess of the nut tree.[38] The orgiastic nature of the dance performed in honour of Artemis Kodaxa in Elis was commented upon even in ancient times; it was witnessed by Pausanias, and certainly betrayed a very crude and primitive level of worship.[39] Hesychius tells of the male and female dancers of the cult of Artemis Korythalia. He records that they were called παρθένιος and παρθενάια, respectively.

The dancers used wooden masks and made ridiculous gestures as part of the ceremony.[40] But we also find other goddesses than Artemis worshipped with ritual dance.

Theokritus describes the choral dances and associated rites performed in the cult of Hera at Therapnai, while the Partheneion of Alcman deals with a similar chorus connected probably with the cult of Artemis Orthia at Sparta.[41] It was from this dance that Helen was supposed to have been abducted by Theseus. The Tonaia festival of Samos also included a chorus of maidens as part of the ceremonies carried out in the worship of the goddess of the lygos tree on that island, Hera.[42]

The groups of nymphs which accompany the goddess Artemis was usually depicted as either huntresses or dancers. The tradition of unmarried girls performing certain religious rituals is common in most primitive cultures as part of the rites of passage, couterpart to the initiation ceremonies of adolescent boys. The tripartite life of a woman - girl, bride, wife, and mother - is emphasized in Greek religion most particularly in the characters of Helen and of Hera. Both goddesses have mythological cycles attached to each of the phases of their maturing. The partaking in choral or dramatic dancing seems to have been particularly an aspect of the adolescent phase. Thus, the mythical lives of the goddesses of the cults reflect the actual religious life of the young girls who took part in their worship.

As a final note on this element of worship in the Greek world, the use of masks seems to have had more than

a single significance in cult use. Not only were masks used to hide one's identity during dramatic performances, but also the mask, especially when hung in a tree or on a temple wall, had an apotropaic function. Many of the masks, and terracotta copies of masks, found in connection with such cults as that of Artemis Orthia, were hideous, and could well be considered capable of frightening away evil spirits from the sanctuary of the goddess.

Common to religious systems centred around nature worship is the injunction against doing injury to a tree or grove dedicated to a divinity. The temporal penalties for cutting down a sacred tree are most severe, although it was also believed that the god with whom it was connected would punish the wrongdoer in his own fashion.[43] The reasoning behind such belief is obvious; if a tree embodies a god, or if he has his home there, as did Zeus and Dione at Dodona, or even if the tree was merely a symbol of the god, as was generally the case during the Classical and later periods of Greek religion, damage done the sacred tree would be synonymous with injuring the god himself. Thus, the Spartans, when they attacked Athens, spared the olives sacred to Athena which stood in the Academy.[44]

In attica, the penalty for cutting down a tree sacred to the Eristhasian Apollo was a fine of fifty drachma for a freeman, and fifty stripes with the lash for a slave.[45] A similar law stood in Messinia. In Athens the law had originally called for the death penalty for injury to a sacred tree.

Cases were tried in the Areopagus, and the law was still on the books in the time of Aristotle, although it was by that date rarely inforced.[46] The myth of the terrible punishment of Ersichthon for cutting down a holy tree in the grove of Demeter emphasizes the gravity of the offense, and there exists a similar tale recounting the death of the son of Poseidon, Halirrothius, in the sanctuary of Athena at Athens. The youth tried to avenge his father's defeat in the contest on the acropolis by destroying the sacred olive tree of Athena there. He missed his stroke, and the axe killed him instead.[47]

There are many other stories of similar divine punishments meted out because of injury done to sacred groves or individual trees. Some of them deal with the lesser divinities, the nymphs and dryads, who had their abode in trees, and whose life cycle was inextricably bound up with the life of their particular tree. They were not immortal, but lived and died as the trees did. Often they were under the protection of a greater member of the Olympic pantheon.

These four themes continually recur in connection with local cults devloted to the various Greek gods. The myths and rituals associated with them vary from cult to cult, but there is always manifested the connection of these aspects of tree worship with the powers of fertility and the propitiation of the Life force. The above discussion of such motifs is, of course, of a very general type, but the intent of this section of the chapter was merely to intro-

duce a few of the more common of the rites and practices which are found in conjunction with tree worship in the Greek world.

In order to assess the character of the tree cult of ancient Greece, it is necessary to examine in some detail certain cults in which tree veneration remained a potent aspect of worship, until such time as we have reliable literary accounting for Greek cultic practice. That is, it was not until the Hellenistic period that there was really any attempt to describe folk religion, as opposed to official Olympian myth, in the literary sources.[49] The cults of three deities in particular are here analyzed, all of them closely allied with the tree cult, and all of the central deities of those cults potent in the realm of vegetal and faunal fertility. The cults of Artemis Orthia of Sparta, of Helen at Therapnai, and of Hera as she was worshipped on the island of Samos all serve to shed some light on the nature of tree worship in the Greek world in ancient times. These goddesses are remarkable similar in character and function when seen in the context of their individual cults at the above-notes sites. Yet, in Homeric and Classical tradition, they are quite separate from one another in both their attributes and their powers. Helen is not even a fully-fledged member of the Olympian family, although there is no doubt of her divine character. All three of the ladies, Artemis Orthia, Helen, and Hera, are tree goddesses, and each is potent in the province of fertility, human, animal, and vegetal.

Notes to Pages 31 to 46

[1]L. Ziehen, RE VI A 2, 1705, as cited by Godehard Kipp, "Zum Hera-Kult auf Samos", Kritische und vergleichende Studien zur Alten Geschichte und Universalgeschichte 18, Innsbruck, 1974, p. 161; Also Frazer vol. 1 pt. 2, p. 140, where he describes the dressing up of the image of the goddess as a bride of the oak-god at Platea.

[2]The Romans hung masks on trees at the time of sowing in order to frighten off evil spirits, Probus on Vergil's Georgics ii.

[3]Boetticher, p. 109.

[4]ibid., p. 28.

[5]Pausanias 8:23:6-7; Clem. Alex. Prot. 2:38:3

[6]Callimachus, Aitia frag. 187; for Clement of Alexandria, see above, note 5.

[7]This is apparent in the cult of Artemis Orthia, for instance, where it is noted by Pausanius 3:17:1 that there was a shrine of Eileithyia "very near" that of Orthia at Sparta. Also, the excavators of the Orthia sanctuary have uncovered votive offerings in the shrine of that goddess which would be far more appropriate to the worship of the goddess of childbirth, than that of Orthia herself.

[8]Theokritus 18.

[9]Pausanias 3:19:9-10.

[10]Plutarch Theseus 20; also Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 315.

[11]Walter F. Otto, Dionysus, Myth and Cult (Bloomington: 1965), p. 137.

[12]Frazer, vol. 4, pt. 1, p. 281.

[13]ibid.

[14]Malten, p. 203.

[15]Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 487.

[16]Eduard Meyer, Geschichte des Alterums, 3rd ed., vol. 1, pt. 2 (Berlin: 1913), p. 722.

[17]Frazer, vol. 4, pt. 1, p. 255 (Trojan coins); Peter Gelling and Hilda Ellis Davidson, The Chariot of the Sun (London: 1969), p. 161.

[18]Malten, p. 200; Meyer, p. 421 (coin of Tarsus).

[19]Codex Theodosianus 16:10:12, as cited by Boetticher, p. 44.

[20]Theokritus 18:43ff; also see Malten, p. 195.

[21]Malten, p. 195f.

[22]Merkelbach, pp. 1-2.

[23]Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 430.

[24]Merkelbach, pl. 4, fig. 1.

[25]ibid., Pl. 2, fig. 15.

[26]Clem. Alex. Stromat. 418; L.F. Farnell, The Cults of the Greek States vol. 1 (Oxford: 1896), p. 14.

[27]Merkelbach, Pl. 3, fig. 1; also Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 82.

[28]ibid.; Scholiast on Pindar's Olympian Odes VIII:95, after Polemon.

[29]Adolf Furtwangler, Die Antiken Gemmen, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Amsterdam: 1964), Pl. VI, fig. 3; also see Evans, figs. 48, 55.

[30]Malten, p. 200.

[31]Melas, p. 165.

[32]Eliade, p. 310.

[33]Evans, fig. 132.

[34]Merkelbach, Pl. 2, fig. 2.

[35]Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 160.

[36]R.M. Dawkins, The Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, suppl. J.H.S. (1929), p. 172.

[37]Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 160.

[38]Pausanias 3:10:7

[39]ibid., 6:22:1.

[40]Hesychius s.v.

[41]Theokritus 18; Alcman Partheneion.

[42]Kipp, p. 160.

[43]Chevalier and Gheerbrant, p. 102; also see De Visser, p. 10.

[44]Nilsson, Greek Folk Religion, p. 32.

[45]Frazer, vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 121.

[46]J.G. Frazer, Pausanias' Description of Greece trans. with commentary, vol. 2 (London: 1913), pp. 393-394.

[47]ibid.

[48]W.C.K. Guthrie, The Greeks and Their Gods (Boston: 1950), p. 101ff.

[49]Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 212.

II

THE CULT OF ARTEMIS ORTHIA

Although it seems that every deity of the ancient Greek pantheon was in some way or other associated with a sacred tree or grove, in the Peloponnese it is Artemis who is most often mentioned in connection with the tree cult. She is accorded such epithets as "Kedreatis", "Karyatis", of the cedar and nut trees, respectively, and "Lygodesma". This latter appellation means literally "bound with lygos", and occurs specifically in reference to the cult of Artemis Orthia at Sparta.

Artemis was well known and widely worshipped as a tree goddess. In the Peloponnese, she particularly betrays her close descent from the old Mistress of the Animals of Minoan and Mycenean days, both in her sphere of influence, and in her connection with the tree cult. Artemis is especially potent in the realm of faunal fertility, but the hanging motif which we have noted previously that is attached to her worship in Arcadia also suggests that she held sway over vegetal nature.

The cult of Artemis Orthia as she was worshipped at Sparta illuminates one particular facet of religious evolution on the part of the early inhabitants of Greece. It would seem that at one time each individual community pos-

sessed its own form of local cult, usually centred around the worship of a female fertility figure of the Mother Goddess type. The rites and beliefs surrounding each cult varied from village to village, as did the name of the lady.[1] As the anthropomorphic and persuasive religious system portrayed in Homeric saga and epic developed and spread throughout Greece, the smaller and less powerful local gods and goddesses tended to become identified by their worshippers with the major deities of the embryonic Olympic pantheon. The deity with whom a local goddess might be identified would usually be the one who most closely paralleled the specific attributes of the older divinity. Many of the old goddesses of fertility and wild nature tended to be equated with the goddess Artemis. Sometimes the old cult name of the deity was retained and attached to the official title of the Olympian who succeeded to the worship at that cult centre. This accounts for the multiplicity of epithets, each usually confined to a single site, which were accorded the great gods and goddesses of Greek myth, and for the variation in specific attribute and function from centre to centre.

Artemis Orthia clearly provides a case where the original goddess of the lygos, or "chaste" tree, Orthia, came to be identified with the figure of Artemis. Some aspects of the Spartan cultic rite and belief are to be found elsewhere in the Greek world, but there is no exact parallel for the ritual framework of the worship of Orthia in any other cult attributed to Artemis.

As a final introductory note, Dawkins, the director of the excavation of the Orthia sanctuary at Sparta in the early part of this century, suggests that Orthia was originally a Dorian goddess, and that she was not a deity worshipped by the indigenous population of the region.[2] However, despite the paucity of remains discovered which date to the Bronze Age, there is no evidence that Orthia was radically different in character or function from the other examples of local fertility and tree goddesses known from the other areas of the Peloponnese. Also, the tree with which she is associated is also the sacred attribute of the goddess Hera, a lady whose origins are obscure, but who is certainly closely related to the early maternal fertility deities of prehellenic date in the Greek world. There is, as we shall see, a great deal of similarity between Artemis Orthia and Hera, at least as the latter goddess was worshipped on the island of Samos.

The tree with which Orthia is associated is called the lygos, and it is attested that the statue of the goddess was wrapped about with the fronds of that tree. The presence of fronds and what appear to be osiers in the mythic tradition surrounding the cult has led to the mistranslation of the word lygos as "willow". However, the lygos is rather what is known in modern botanical terminology the "chaste" tree, a form of large shrub with a similar configuration to the so-called "weeping" willow. The lygos, too, has down-hanging fronds and will produce withies, if cut back.

There is also mentioned in connection with tree worship the cult of Asclepius Hagnitas at Sparta.[3] The latter

was associated with the "chaste", or lygos tree, as well.

The cult of Artemis Orthia was surrounded with ancient tales of strange and bloody practices. Pausanias relates the mythic story of the discovery of the cult image in a bed of withies, entangled in the fronds of a lygos tree. The boys who found the statue subsequently went mad. The name of the deity is thus explained by the conditions under whcih her image was introduced to the Laconians. "Orthia" means standing or upright, and the statue was found held erect by the withies growing up around it. Pausanias goes on to state that the first worshippers at the shrine of the goddess turned on one another and stained her altar with human blood, and that ever after, Orthia was known for her craving of the blood of human sacrifices. He tells us also that Lycurgus changed the rite from that of human sacrifice to the one which Pausanias found still being carried out in his own day - the whipping of the Spartan ephebes before the altar of the goddess.[4]

Should the whipping prove too gentle, the image of Orthia which was carried throughout the ritual by the priestess would become unbearably heavy, although it was normally small and light.[5] Both Plutarch and Xenophon give alternate explanations for the rite, but whatever the origins of the practice, it is certain that it still was carried out well into the Roman period, and with such enthusiasm that the boys sometimes died under the whip.[6]

The tale related by Xenophon gives a different

reason for the undergone by the ephebes. He says the rite was originally begun when a group of boys had at one time attempted to steal some cheese which had been left as a gift to Orthia from the altar of that goddess. His account suggests that the later ritual consisted of one group of boys trying to steal cheese from the altar, while another defended the offering, brandishing whips. Thus, according to Xenophon, the annual ἀγών which took place at Sparta would result in the victory of those boys who best managed to withstand the pain of the beating, while stealing more cheese than anyone else.[7] Whether this ordeal was part and parcel of the rites described by Pausanias, or whether it was a different ceremony altogether, is unclear. However, Nilsson makes the interesting point that the offering of cheese to a fertility goddess such as Orthia indicated a form of worship that could only be characteristic of an agricultural people.[8] Thus, the latter tale could give some clue as to the original nature of cult worship in Sparta at a very primitive level, while the myth recounted by Pausanias may well be a later aetion developed to account for a particularly brutal rite whose original meaning had been by this time forgotten.

At any rate, whatever the origins of the practice, the later rites associated with the cult are more clear. The youths who served as stealers of cheese in the ceremony, and survived the ordeal, without displaying signs of weakness were awarded prizes, and accorded the title βωμονίκας, since the rite took place before the altar of the goddess.[9]

Other contests which the Spartan worshippers carried out in honour of Artemis Orthia are also recorded. These in particular were the μῶα , a singing competition, the κελῆα , possibly an oratory contest, and the καθηρατορίον , some sort of hunting game.[10] Stelae were set up that recorded the names of the victors in these events, and which had small iron sickles attached to them. These latter were called δρεπάναι , and seem to have been the prize awarded the victors.[11] Another obscure rite, this time carried out by young girls, is suggested by a fragment of Alcman.[12]

There are several problems presented upon a close examination of the cult of Artemis Orthia at Sparta. First of all, it is clear from the archaeological and epigraphical evidence that the original goddess of the cult was not Artemis, but Orthia. Artemis was only assimilated into the cult at a later date, probably sometime around the mid-sixth century B.C. Secondly, the "Lygodesma" story related by Pausanias is obviously an aetion developed to account for the connection between Orthia and the lygos tree, and especially for the tradition that she was actually bound to the tree in a physical way. There is a strong case to be made for the theory that Orthia was originally a tree goddess, and that certain of her rites are explicable only in light of such an identity for the deity.[13] The rites themselves, although paralleled to some extent by the ritual beating of initiates which characterized the cult of Dionysus, are unusually brutal for Greek religious practices. Were they

truly religious in origin, or, as Frazer suggests, a form of primitive intitation rite, such as one finds in most primitive cultures?[14] Certainly by the time of the Romans, the ordeal was considered essential to the rigorous testing undergone by Spartan youths as part of their military training.

The problem of the identity of the goddess at the Spartan sanctuary may be dealt with by an examination of the votive and inscriptional remains excavated at the shrine of Artemis Orthia by the British School early in this century.[15] The archaeologists found a series of consecutive sanctuaries at the site, beginning with a plain earthen altar, and ending with the remains of a Roman theatre built for the observation of the contest and ordeal which took place there, and which had apparently become something of a tourist attraction by that late date. Amongst the archaeological findings were uncovered tens of thousands of votive images made of ivory, bone, and terracotta, as well as a plethora of little lead figuries. Together with these were uncovered a large quantity of terracotta masks, which the excavators quite correctly assumed to have been mostly mere images of dramatic masks, rather than the actual item, since these were, for the sake of durability and lightness, normally made of wood.[16] This leads one to the question of whether or not the masks indicate the celebration at the shrine of some form of ritual drama, performed as part of the rites of Orthia. There is ample evidence, as we have

seen, that dances and dramas were a usual part of the worship of the goddess Artemis elsewhere.[17]

The chronology established by the excavators for the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia at Sparta has recently been down-dated by Boardman. The dates here recorded are those of the amended chronology.[18]

The original shrine, as far as one may tell from the archaeological remains, was a simple earthen altar. The pottery associated with this level Boardman ascribes to the end of the eighth century B.C. A cobbled pavement contemporary with the altar was also found. About 570 B.C., it seems that the area was subjected to a flood, which destroyed the first temple on the site. Before rebuilding, a layer of sand was laid to level the gound in order to provide a more suitable surface for the temple foundations, and to cover the debris of the destroyed shrine. This provides a convenient terminus post quem for later levels. At this point in time, a stone temple was erected. The last major change in the sanctuary took place in the third century of our era, when a small Roman theatre was built in order to facilitate the observation of the cult rituals and possible dramatic presentations carried out in honour of Orthia.[19]

The earlier layers reveal votive figures which would be most appropriate to a local πότνια θηρῶν figure. The connection between this type of female divinity and the tree cult is well established and need not be elaborated upon here. Many of the small votive offerings proved to be in the shape of various animals, and this certainly would

bear out that Orthia was indeed a goddess of this type.[20]

The stratigraphy of the votive offerings suggests a definite change in the cult occurring about 560 B.C. That is, immediately after the sand layer, and coinciding with the building of the new temple. The evidence suggests that it was about this time that the identification of Orthia with Artemis took place. The transition need not have been so abrupt as the analysis of the archaeological evidence would suggest; such transitions normally must have taken place over a longer period of time. It is evident, too, that the two goddesses were at the Spartan site never fully assimilated, and that the goddess with the earlier hegemony at the site retained her separate character to a certain degree throughout the ancient period of her worship.[21]

Nonetheless, up until the flood level, the votive images had mainly consisted of figures of a winged lady, usually identified with the goddess herself, ordinary female votive figurines, and all kinds of animal images, many depicting lions or horses. In addition, quite a few figures of horses bearing human riders were uncovered in these layers. Many of the equestrians appear to be female, and were taken by the excavators to also represent the goddess of the shrine.

After the sand layer, however, there appear for the first time figures of deer, the sacred animal of Artemis. Also new to these layers were figures of a goddess bearing the aegis, although the earlier winged ladies continue to be found in large numbers. There were fewer different types

of animals represented as well, and this latter process continued until by the Roman period only deer and cocks are to be found. However, at this late date, another interesting transition has taken place, for all the aegis-bearing goddesses have disappeared, while the earlier winged ladies have reasserted themselves.[22]

One of the most interesting developments in votive offerings at the shrine is to be seen in the fact that although large numbers of terracotta masks, as stated earlier, were discovered in association with the later temple (that above the sand layer), only a couple of examples are dated earlier than the destruction of the first shrine.[23] This would surely indicate that the introduction of the worship of Artemis at the Spartan sanctuary took place sometime in the middle of the sixth century before Christ, and coincided with the building of the stone temple which occurred at that level. It would also suggest that there must have been some change in cult practice inherent in the transformation, since masks were apparently not offered to Orthia before the assimilation of that deity to the figure of Artemis.[24] The only other possible reason for the sudden appearance of the masks as votive objects is the suggestion that previous to the building of the stone temple, wooden masks, which were certainly used in the actual ceremonies, were themselves offered to the goddess after the ritual in which they were used had taken place. These would, of course, leave little in the way of archaeological remains. This does not, however, account for an abrupt shift to the dedication of

terracotta copies of the wooden masks, which would, according to the theory, have to have taken place at the time of the construction of the new temple. A transformation in worship seems a more likely explanation for so radical a change in the religious practices of a people so notoriously conservative as were the ancient Spartans.

Additional evidence in this regard may be found in the cult of Helen as she was worshipped at the Therapnai site of the so-called Menelaion. Briefly, that divinity seems to have been much the same sort of goddess as was Orthia, although there is no indication of a whipping ceremony attached to the cult of Helen. Still, many of the votive gifts discovered at the Menelaion are identical to those offered to Orthia at the same time, including the many equestrian images uncovered at both shrines. Yet at the sanctuary of Helen, only a couple of votive clay masks have come to light. This indicates that either the wooden masks were utilized exclusively in the dances and/or dramatic performances carried out in honour of Helen at Therapnai, or else that the use of terracotta copies of such masks at the Orthia sanctuary was purely a function of the assimilation of the goddess Artemis to the worship of Orthia at the Spartan site. There is no indication of an identification between the figure of Helen and that of Artemis having taken place.[25]

Be that as it may, it is evident that the two goddesses, Orthia and Artemis, were never fully assimilated, even in the eyes of the worshippers at the shrine of a deity now known as Artemis Orthia.[26] The many inscriptions found

at her cult centre bear this out. Although throughout the life of the sanctuary there, there are many dedications to the goddess which read ἱερὸν Βορθέιας or Βωρθειας ἱερον , there are no extant examples of inscriptions in which the name of Artemis appears alone, without the addition of the title of her sister deity, a title which is now her own cult epithet. Obviously Orthia was never entirely submerged in, or even equated with, the worship of Artemis, although certain characteristic rites, including one which involved the use of masks, were added to the original cult.[27]

The phenomenon described may most easily be accounted for in the following manner; the concept of a systematized Olympic pantheon must have been fairly well established throughout the Greek world by the mid-sixth century B.C., when Artemis made her appearance in the cult of Artemis Orthia at Sparta. The official religion was transmitted partly through the prestige of Athens, and partly through other forces, notably the pervasive influence of popular poetry and song. Despite this fact, the local deities who lived on in their rustic shrines and sacred groves could hardly be ignored, whatever their exalted relatives might be doing on Olympus. Besides, their rites were old and familiar, and integral to the way of life of the myriad small communities which dotted the mainland and islands of Greece. In order to effect a compromise of the two divine systems, the local deities were gradually, and probably not consciously, fitted into the evolving mythological complex surrounding the official Olympian order of gods. Many

of the older divinities became submerged in the larger worship. But, in later myth and cult, whenever one delves beneath the surface of the pretty myths and traditions, one finds traces of a far more ancient and primitive form of belief. Callisto has become a nymph of Artemis, Hyakinthos is fitted into the myths of Apollo, Hippolytus is assimilated to the tales surrounding the gods Aphrodite and Poseidon, Ariadne loses her divine character altogether, until it is returned to her by the god Dionysus when he makes her his bride. Both Orthia and Helen seem to have better retained their original identities, despite the partial merging of their rites and characteristics resultant from their common origin as goddesses of the πότνια θηρῶν type.

It is possible, in the light of the artifactual evidence found at the Orthia site, that the older goddess did indeed reassert herself towards the end of the period of her worship. The goddess-with-the-aegis votive figures seem only to have become fashionable as gifts to the goddess of the Orthia shrine with the introduction of Artemis to that cult. They lost popularity in the Roman period in favor of the older, winged-goddess figurines of the pre-Artemis days of the sanctuary. If the winged ladies are to be seen as especially characteristic of the worship of Orthia, as opposed to that of Artemis, then it seems likely that Orthia was again recognized as the central divinity at the Spartan shrine by that date. Having established that Orthia alone was the original goddess worshipped at the sanctuary, and that Artemis was herself a late addition of the cult, the

problem remains as to what the primitive character of Orthia actually was, and what was the significance of the rites by which she was propitiated.

It has already been mentioned that Orthia was in all probability one of the πότνια θηρῶν figures so common in prehistoric religion in the Greek world, and thereby closely associated with the tree cult. The sacred tree of Orthia was the lygos, as is borne out both by the tale related by Pausanias, and by her cult epithet, Lygodesma, "bound with lygos". The association of this Spartan goddess with a lygos tree is natural enough on geographic grounds, since the area in which the sanctuary is located is quite marshy. Watery soil conditions and the abundance of decaying vegetation characteristic of swampy regions are the natural habitat of trees of the willow and lygos families. There was, as added testimony to the climate of the area during ancient times, even a separate sanctuary nearby dedicated to Artemis Limnaia, Artemis of the Marshes.[28] It is a feature of tree-goddesses that they often were worshipped in the early days of Greek religion in the form of βρέτας or ξοανον .[29] The general term for such aniconic or semi-iconic images was ἀγάλματα . Hera of Samos, another lygos-bound goddess, was worshipped throughout the life of her shrine in the form of a rough wooden plank, although beside it in the sanctuary from 650 B.C. onwards stood a far more sophisticated anthropomorphic statue.[30] The image of Orthia, too, was of this primitive type.

The actual images, small wooden trunk-like figures,

which are intended to represent the goddess are illustrated by Merkelbach.[31] They show a figure which more resembles a statue than a living goddess. If so, then the image is evidently wound about with something, probably lygos fronds. There is, however, no indication of how the image came to be wrapped in lygos foliage in the first place. It seems that in this cult we find another example of the motif where the cult statue is "discovered" by its subsequent worshippers, rather than fashioned by an artist and then dedicated to the deity. It is implicit in such tales of discovery that the divinity herself caused the image to appear in peculiar circumstances for it to be found by the people whom she wished to have as her worshippers. The circumstances of the discovery would then dictate the particular character of the god or goddess at that site.[32]

In the milieu of primitive religious thought, it is probable that Orthia was bound up with the foliage of the tree sacred to her in order to maintain the fundamental sacral connection between her sacred tree and the goddess herself. If she had originally been worshipped, as in the Minoan and Mycenean religious systems, in a primitive outdoor shrine connected with her holy lygos tree, then the image was probably placed in or under the tree. It could then quite easily have become surrounded with withies, and wrapped in the dangling fronds of that tree. After the construction of a temple proper, with the attendant sophistication of the cult, and the transfer of the image of Orthia to the internal sanctuary, the sacral association

with the tree would have had to be maintained by some means. This could be accomplished by the periodic binding up of the statue with the fronds of the lygos tree. In other words, after the cult statue of Orthia was removed from its natural surroundings of living wood and vegetation, the life force of the image, the mana, would require constant revitalization through occasional contact with the tree from which it had been parted, and from whose wood it had probably originally been fashioned. Such practices are another expression of the primitive religious concept of "sympathetic magic", whereby the potency inherent in a living object may be transferred to an inanimate one through a touch.

Nilsson offers an intriguing suggestion as to how a similar phenomenon might account for the bloody ordeal undergone by the Spartan youths in honour of Artemis Orthia. It is his theory that the boys were actually whipped at one time with the boughs of the sacred lygos tree.[33]

The earliest literary mention of the beating of the boys at the Spartan sanctuary comes from the writings of Cicero, who describes the διαμαστίγωσις.[34] The rite, which dates to well before the eighth century B.C., certainly had had by the time of that eminent Roman plenty of time for evolutionary change. Pausanias attributes the brutality of the practice to the suggestion that it replaced human sacrifice in the worship of the goddess. The idea may be a function of the Spartan tendency to lay every change in their way of life at the doorstep of Lycurgus, or else may

be a rationalization on the part of Pausanias himself.[35] It is certainly not supportable in light of other primitive cultures in which human sacrifice was phased out of religious ritual.

The normal line of development in primitive religion is the substitution of an animal for the human offering. Often the change is ascribed to the direct intervention of the god to whom the sacrifice was being made, as in the Biblical tale of the sacrifice of Isaac, and the discovery of the ram caught in the thicket on the part of Abraham.

It is suggested, then, that the human sacrifice origin of the flagellation or contest at the shrine of Artemis Orthia is merely a later rationalization of the practice; in many primitive societies are to be found initiation rituals involving ordeals of pain or endurance as an integral part of the cultural base of the community. The rites are attributed either to the necessity of purifying the tribe or an individual, or else to an initiation ceremony whereby the youths are accepted into a society as fully-fledged adults. Thomsen maintains that the practice of whipping the boys of Sparta before the altar of the goddess who demanded it, had the former, cleansing significance.[36] It is Frazer's opinion, in light of the age of the boys who participated in the rite,[37] and the fact that <u>all</u> Spartan boys were evidently expected to take part, that the rite was used as a form of initiation.[38]

Despite the general puzzlement with which most scholars of Greek religion seem to regard the bloody rituals connected with the cult of Artemis Orthia at Sparta, Nilsson's

theory seems to provide a satisfactory explanation. He considers the whipping of boys with boughs cut from the holy tree to represent a form of communion with the deity.[39] The concept that part of the sacred tree, such as the branch used in the Mayday celebrations of many European countries, will impart something of the potency of the living tree to those things with which it comes into contact is yet persistent in many parts of the modern world. The transfer of mana from a branch may be brought about by touching it; this would be true either of a house into which the bough was brought, or of a human votary who touched it. There are many artistic representations in Minoan and Mycenean glyptic art in which is shown the image of a young votary touching or shaking the boughs of a tree holy in the worship of the Mother Goddess.[40] Presumably this is done in order, in some way, to take unto oneself the life force embodied in the tree, possibly for fertility purposes. By the same token, it would not be out of keeping with the psychology of ancient religion that rituals whereby boys were repeatedly struck with the boughs or foliage belonging to the sacred tree of the goddess would provide a sort of communion with the deity herself. One hardly needs to point out that the votaries depicted in the seals mentioned are nearly invariably portrayed as young boys. On a few of them only does one find what appear to be girls engaged in a similar activity.

On one small point I should like to disagree with Nilsson; this is in regard to his assertion that the parts

of the tree which were utilized in the Laconian rite were the boughs. Considering the actual shape of the chaste tree, which resembles a large shrub of the willow family, it is more likely that it was the thin and supple osiers which spring up about the roots of the lygos that were used for whipping the ephebes. Many an English schoolboy can attest to the efficacy of withies when used as "canes". The fact that the pain was obviously a perquisite of the Spartan ritual makes the osier a more appropriate instrument than either the unwieldy bough, or the thin and flexible frond that hangs down from the lygos' branches.

The comparison of the cult of Artemis Orthia with other primitive and ancient religious practices, together with the fact that Orthia was the goddess to whom the lygos tree was sacred in Laconia, tends to support the hypothesis that the ritual flagellation - whether or not it occurred as part of a cheese-stealing contest - of the ephebes at Sparta had as its foundation the primitive concept that in this way mana could be transmitted from the sacred tree, and therefore the goddess herself, to the votary. Despite the fact that Cicero gives us the first literary mention of the rite of διαμαστίγωσις, the very simple level of religious consciousness which would permit the acceptance of such a concept suggests quite an early date for the establishment of the Spartan ritual. That the whipping of the boys was a integral part of the rites accorded the goddess Artemis Orthia is attested both by the longevity of the practice, and by the enthusiasm with which it was

carried out.

There is in the ancient sources for the cult nowhere mentioned the actual instrument used in the ceremony. The very omission of this detail indicates that the whip itself was unremarkable. Probably by the time of our first literary reference to the Spartan cult, the old usage of parts of the sacred tree for this purpose had been abandoned in favor of real whips or lashes. However, in light of the tale recounted by Xenophon, it would seem that, should the original rite have been at the outset practised at an outdoor sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, the nearest weapon to hand with which to defend the altar of the goddess could well have been the osiers which grew about the foot of the sacred lygos tree.

There seems little doubt that the ceremony was indeed, at least by the historical period, intended as some sort of initiation rite. It entailed the endurance of an ordeal whereby the young boys of Sparta "received the goddess" through blows dealt them with parts of the tree dedicated to her.[41] It continued throughout the life of the cult to be a fundamental aspect of the worship of Artemis Orthia, although in the later period of the old association with osiers as the instrument of flagellation (or defence) was lost, and the entire ritual became simply one of the tests undergone by the Spartan ephebes as they approached manhood.

That the goddess Artemis should become assimilated into a cult with the type of rituals outlined above is not

unlikely. She was the goddess of wild nature, and, as such, could also be somewhat cruel and unpredictable. But she also was designated κουροτροφος, protectress of youths, and could well have been propitiated in an initiation ceremony for them.[42] She, too, was the deity who presided over the birth of animals and men, and in this aspect was closely identified with the goddess of childbirth, Eileithyia. Orthia was also connected with that deity, for Pausanias records that there was a shrine of Eileithyia "very near" to that of the Spartan goddess. The relationship of the two deities may be ascribed to the fact that Orthia, as a πότνια θηρῶν and descendant of the Bronze Age Mother Goddess, too, would have been powerful in the realm of human and animal reproduction.[43] Certain of the votive images found at the Orthia site portray crude human figures with grotesquely exaggerated sexual organs, typical offerings to the force of earthly fertility.[44]

Pausanias tells us that the image of Orthia, though normally small and light, (surely it was made of wood!), grew unbearably heavy in the arms of the priestess who carried it should those brandishing the ships pull their strokes because a boy was particularly beautiful, or for some other consideration. The priestess would then cry out to them that they were hurting her through their lack of diligence.[45] Frazer comments upon this odd occurrence, relating the tale told by Dio Chrysostom in this regard, whereby the women of Greece sometimes were thought able to judge the will of a deity by gauging the weight of an object, usually a stone.

Frazer then mentions that similar beliefs were held by primitive tribes in the early part of our century.[46]

The name of Orthia occurs elsewhere in ancient Greece, although there is no note of rituals carried out in her honour outside of Laconia which included such an ordeal or contest as is described in connection with the Spartan sanctuary.[47] There is reference to a town called Orthia in the Valley of Elis, and it was said that one of the sixteen women chosen to arbitrate for the Elean and Pisaian peoples had come from there. An alternate version of the story is that the same women were involved in the cult of Hera at Argos, that it was they who, every four years, wore the robe which was presented to the goddess there, and presided over her games, one of which consisted of a footrace between young girls.[48]

The conclusion one reaches as a result of an examination of the cult of Artemis Orthia at Sparta are as follows: the original goddess worshipped at the sanctuary was not Artemis at all, but a primitive form of πότνια θηρῶν figure, and a divinity of the same sort of character and function as Artemis, by the name of Orthia. This is borne out by the number of votive animal figures found at the shrine, and by the fact that the goddess Eileithyia was in some way connected with the worship of Orthia and had a shrine "nearby".

Orthia was also a tree goddess, particularly associated with the lygos, or chaste, tree, a willow-like shrub. Her first sanctuary probably consisted of a small outdoor shrine centred about her sacred tree, with an altar before it, and the bretas of the goddess herself somehow attached to the tree. After the image had been removed to the interior shrine of the first temple built on the site, the sacral connection between tree and deity was broken. Therefore, it is necessary that the tie be reaffirmed periodically, that is, that the mana of the image be "recharged", perhaps annually, by the wrapping of the ξοανον with the fronds of the holy tree. Hence the attribute, applied to the image, rather than the goddess herself, "lygodesma", bound with the lygos.

The rites carried out in honour of Artemis Orthia included an initiation ritual for young boys, consisting of either a contest centred around the theft of some cheese from the altar of the goddess in which whips were used to defend the offerings, or else of an ordeal of flagellation. In the latter, victory was attained by the lad who could best endure pain. This rite must have begun as part of the veneration accorded the tree in the worship of the goddess at that site; thus, the boys entered manhood by first "receiving the goddess" in a ritual whipping ceremony in which was utilized part of the sacred tree, most probably the osiers which grew up about its roots. This latter theory, first formulated by the eminent M.P. Nilsson, has, of course, no means of proof on either literary or archaeological grounds. Rather,

it is a result of the application of primitive religious attitudes towards initiation and sympathetic magic to the transfer of mana.

At any rate, the practice of whipping the Spartan ephebes in honour of Artemis Orthia lasted well into the Roman days of the cult, although, by the time of Cicero, it would seem that the original reason for the rite had become obscured, submerged in the programme of ordeals which the youths of that city were expected to undergo. By this time, or at least by the third century A.D., the ritual flagellation and contests had become something of a spectacle for tourists, as the building of the theatre at that time suggests.

Regarding the dates for the assimilation of the worship of Artemis into the cult of Orthia at Sparta, it is clear from the archaeological and epigraphical evidence that the synthesis took place about the middle of the sixth century B.C. It was probably occasioned by the pervasive influence exerted upon Greek religion by the Olympian system of deities, prompted in no small part by the popularity of the poetry of Homer. This was likely coupled with the growing prosperity and sophistication of the Spartan way of life, and the organization of that society in regard to state religion. The transition is marked by the remains of a temple dedicated to Artemis Orthia which appears to have been built no later than 570 B.C. At that time we find the first votive images of deer appearing, the deer being the sacred animal of the goddess Artemis. These occured in

the same context as figures of a winged female, known from earlier levels, a new image of a female deity bearing the aegis, and large quantities of votive terracotta masks. These were presumably used in a ritual drama or dance such as is characteristic of the worship of Artemis at other cult centres.

Notes to Pages 51 to 75

[1]Vermeule, p. 19; also see Jacquetta Hawkes, p. 277, where she makes the point that the oldest surviving cult centres in Greece tend to be those associated with female divinities, although in some cases, as in the Delian sanctuary, the worship was later transferred to a male member of the Olympic pantheon.

[2]H.J. Rose, "Artemis", O.C.D., p. 104; see also Dawkins' introduction to the site report from the Orthia shrine in J.H.S. supplement, 1929.

[3]Pausanias 3:4:7-11

[4]ibid., 3:4:11.

[5]ibid., 3:16:11; There is also some suggestion that the image of Orthia worshipped there was the same statue that had been brought from Tauris by Iphigenaia and Orestes. The image identified with the Taurian statue by Helbig, Fuhrer II, 1863, ill. 1333 certainly fits the description of Pausamias, and seems to be a reproduction of a small, light, wooden cult statue.

[6]Xenophon de Laced. 2:7. idem, Lycurgus 18.

[7]ibid., also Plutarch Aristeides 17.

[8]Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 489.

[9]H.J. Rose, "The Cult of Artemis Orthia", contained in the site report compiled by Dawkins, p. 406.

[10]ibid.

[11]Dawkins, P. 35; Nilsson states that the gifts for victory in the games, the small sickles which mark the stelae, indicate, again, that Orthia was a goddess concerned with faunal and vegetal fertility, Geschichte, p. 489. Indeed, sickles of this type could just as easily have been presented as awards in games celebrated in honour of another lady deity, Demeter, the Greek goddess of corn.

[12]Alcman, frag. i. 60 (95) sqq., Diehl, cited by Rose, "The Cult of Artemis Orthia" with the following reading:

ται πελειάδες γάρ ἄμιν
Ὀρθ[ρ]ιᾳ φᾶρος φεροίσαιο
νύκτα δι' ἀμβροσιάν ἄτε Σήριον
ἄστρον ἀυειρομέναι μάχονται

[13]see p. 64f; also Nilsson, History of Greek Religion, p. 94.

[14]see Pausanias 8:23:1; also, one might refer to the panel depicting the flagellation of the female initiate in the Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii; Frazer, Pausanias, vol. 3, p. 341.

[15]Dawkins, site report.

[16]idem, "The masks", p. 172; also articles there by A.M. Woodward and A.J.B. Wace on the votive offerings uncovered at the Orthia sanctuary. L. Ziehen also discusses the use of masks at the Spartan site. He refers to the fact that there seem to be remains of some wooden masks, as well, which were probably utilized in the worship of Orthia, (p. 1466). He cites as evidence the illustrations of certain holes left in the soil by decaying matter, in his opinion, masks; B.S.A. 12, pl. XI, and XII. Hesychius refers to the use of masks at Sparta specifically, calling them " ".

[17]Nilsson, Minoan-Mycenean Religion, p. 503

[18]J. Boardman, "Artemis Orthia and Chronology", B.S.A. 58 (1963), pp. 1-7. His revised chronology, based on the pottery found at the site, is as follows:

Geometric	8th century-650 B.C.
Laconian	650-620 B.C.
Laconian II (to the sand)	620-570/560 B.C.
Laconian II as a style	620-580 B.C.

----------Sand----------

[19]Dawkins, p. 34.

[20]Nilsson, Minoan-Mycenean Religion, p. 551.

[21]This is borne out by the inscriptions found at the Orthia site, and published in the excavation report by A.M. Woodward. Many of these date to the first century B.C., and were discovered incorporated into the building of the later Roman theatre.

[22]A.J.B. Wace, "The Lead Figurines", site report, p. 281.

[23]idem, "The Masks", p. 164.

[24]It is evident from the archaeological, mythical, and epigraphical evidence that the worship of Artemis as it was carried out at the Spartan cult under discussion was quite different in character from that of any other religious centre in Greece. It is therefore unlikely that Orthia and her rituals were considered normal adjuncts to the worship of Artemis outside of Laconia. Indeed, the nearest parallel for the Spartan cult is not found in a cult of Artemis, but in one dedicated to the goddess Hera at Samos.

[25]M.S. Thompson, "Laconia. Excavations at Sparta, the Menelaion", B.S.A. (1909/10), p. 124.

[26]For instance, we find the name "Orthia" occurring

elsewhere in the Greek world, independent of the name Artemis.

[27]Wace, p. 283.

[28]Pausanias 3:4:7; Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 490.

[29]Malten, p. 199; Boetticher, p. 228ff.

[30]Kipp, p. 158; Pausanias 8:23:5.

[31]Merkelbach, pl. 4, figs. 1-2.

[32]Other instances in Greek myth where the image of a god or goddess is discovered by the worshippers are mentioned in note 20, Chapter II.

[33]Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 487; also cites Thomsen as an author of the same theory which he himself develops.

[34]Cicero Tusc. Disp. ii. 34; also Plutarch Inst. Lacon. 239 D.

[35]Pausanias 3:16:10; Plutarch Lycurgus 18.

[36]Thomsen, cited by Rose, "The Cult of Artemis Orthia", p. 404.

[37]Plutarch Lycurgus 18; Hygenus s.v.

[38]Frazer, Pausanias, vol. 3, p. 342.

[39]Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 487;

[40]Evans, fig. 55, 132.

[41]Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 487; Ziehen agrees with this hypothesis, p. 1465f.

[42]Nilsson, Minoan-Mycenean Religion, p. 486; Stylianos, p. 71.

[43]Pausanias 3:16:11 " οὐ πόρρω "; R.M. Dawkins, "Laconia: The Excavations at Sparta", B.S.A. (1909), p. 21. The archaeologists at the Orthia sanctuary came across a small image of a woman giving birth, aided by two birth daemons. It is dated to the period of the first temple on the site.

[44]Dawkins, site report (J.H.S. suppl.), p. 156.

[45]Pausanias 3:16:11.

[46]Dio Chrysostom Or. xiii. vol. 1, p. 241 (Dindorf ed.), cited by Frazer, Pausanias, vol. 3, p. 341.

[47]Pindar, Ol. 3:54 (Athens); Pausanias 5:16:6 (Elis); C.I.G. 1064 (Megara); Eph. Arch. 1885, p. 195 (Epidaurus); Herodotus 4:87 (Byzantium).

[48]Pausanias 5:16:2-6.

IV

HELEN, GODDESS OF THE PLANE TREE

In the figure of Helen as she appeared in Laconian cult, we have another example of a prehellenic fertility deity whose worship survived into the Classical period, and who was intimately tied in with the tree cult. Unlike Artemis Orthia, Helen was not a member of the official Olympic pantheon, although literary references to her leave no doubt as to her divinity. The chief centre for her worship was the Menelaion at Therapnai, near Sparta, the site with which we are here primarily concerned. That her worship continued there until the time of Pausanias attests to the fact that Helen was not only a human character in the Homeric sagas, but also a goddess in her own right, and potent in the area of animal and vegetal fertility.

It is indeed curious that the cult of Helen at Therapnai, and its similarities to that of Artemis Orthia at Sparta, have been largely ignored by scholars, including those archaeologists who excavated both sites simultaneously in the early part of this century.[1] Not only are the votive remains extant from the two shrines remarkably alike in type and date, but the figures of Helen and Orthia are also linked in myth. They are goddesses of much the same character and function, and are probably similar of descent,

their common ancestress being the old Mediterranean Mother Goddess. Unfortunately, little is known of the rites connected with the worship of Helen at Therapnai, but a comparison of the two goddesses may yet serve to shed light upon the character of deities whose special attribute was the tree.

Pausanias tells us that the Menelaion was the site of the burial of Helen and her husband, Menelaus, and that there was a second shrine nearby which was dedicated to the worship of Helen alone.[2] There is little doubt that the Menelaion was originally devoted to the veneration of a female fertility deity of the πότνια θηρῶν , so it seems likely that Menelaus was a later addition to the cult, perhaps as a result of the influence of the Homeric tradition. There is also mention of a sanctuary of Helen on the island of Rhodes, where she was called by the cultic epithet of "δενδρίτης ", a direct reference to her function as a tree goddess.[3] The tree considered sacred to her was the plane; this tree was also associated with her husband, Menelaus, at Kaphyae in Arcadia, and with his brother, Agamemnon, at Aulis.[4]

The mythology surrounding the figure of Helen which remains outside the Homeric cycle bears a striking resemblance to the stories recounted about both Ariadne and Kore-Persephone. The latter two ladies dated back to the days of Minoan and Mycenean religion, and there is evidence that Helen, too, was worshipped at such an early date. Unlike the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, which is less than ten

miles away, the Menelaion is founded upon extensive Mycenean remains.[5] Helen is either the evolved form of, or the successor to, the original Mycenean tree-and-fertility goddess who must have inhabited the Bronze Age shrine. The series of events in the mythological biography of Helen up until the time of her marriage to Menelaus may well represent a survival of various religious motif connected with such deities in Mycenean hieratic myth.[6]

Like both Ariadne and Persephone, Helen was abducted as a young girl by the heroes Theseus and Perithoos, although, in the case of Persephone, the kidnap attempt proved abortive. Perithoos was the son of Zeus in stallion form, and brother to the centaurs, while Theseus may have been the son of Poseidon, also connected with horses. Later there occurred a second rape in the myths of the three ladies; Ariadne became the wife of Dionysus, thereby attaining divine status, Persephone married Hades, and Helen, of course, was taken off by Paris to Troy. Helen was supposed to have been hanged on Rhodes after the death of her husband at the instigation of the vengeful Polyxo, hence her epithet at that centre for her worship, δενδρίτης. According to Plutarch, there survives one account of the death of Ariadne in which she was also hanged, like Helen, as the ultimate result of infidelity.[8]

The abduction-rape cycle here presented in regard to the three female divinities above described (at least, Ariadne is not divine in later myth until her marriage to

Dionysus) is probably a manifestation in myth and primitive ritual of a concept of the interaction between the two aspects of fertility, the male and female forces of the cosmos. These are, in the primitive worldview, responsible for all earthly creation and reproduction. This element is related to the annual cycle of the seasons. The female vegetation deity is carried off in the fall, only to return in the spring, bringing with her all the fruits of the warmer weather, and then is abducted again in the autumn to herald the onset of the following winter.[9] The hanging motif, which is demonstrably an attribute of vegetation and fertility goddesses connected with the sacred tree, is absent only in the case of the surviving mythology of Kore-Persephone.

Helen δενδρίτης is a hanging goddess worshipped on Rhodes. Menelaus is said to have possessed a sacred plane tree and spring near Kaphyae in Arcadia.[10] Nearby is a sanctuary of Artemis ἀπαγχομένη, the hanging Artemis, whose aetiological explanation for her epithet is explained by Pausanias.[11] Finally, the artifacts uncovered at the Menelaion and the Orthia sanctuaries are very similar. Is there, then, an affinity between the characters of Helen and Artemis in Peloponnesian cult which is not accounted for in Homeric tradition?

The Partheneion of Alcman describes a chorus of girls performing certain rites in honour of a goddess who is probably Artemis Orthia.[12] It was from just such a dance that Helen was abducted by Theseus, and we are told that the

she was worshipped at Therapnai become more striking when one examines the archaeological evidence for the two cults. Despite the surprising brevity of the accounts of the excavation of the Menelaion, which was carried out in the first decade of this century by the British School, one is continually struck by the similarity between the votive remains found at the two shrines. Both sanctuaries contained votive figures made from terracotta, bone, ivory, bronze, lead and stone; the dates for these finds are also quite close to one another.

The dating of the Menelaion itself is generally outlined in the report of the excavation published by R.M. Dawkins in 1910. The analysis of the material in light of the dates he presents is somewhat difficult, since, although Boardman has recently published his revised chronology for the Orthia sanctuary, there has been no similar effort taken with the Therapnai excavation report. It does seem reasonable to presume, though, that the archaeologists made the same basic errors in dating the Menelaion as they did at the nearby Spartan shrine of Orthia, and that the new dates proposed by Boardman may be applied to each.

The original sanctuary at Therapnai existed in Mycenean times, as is evident from the Mycenean foundations and pottery uncovered there. Subsequent shrines at Therapnai are unfortunately difficult to distinguish, save for the first century temple, parts of which are still extant.[18] In debris heaps to the north and east of this shrine were found poros blocks seemingly belonging to a previous temple on the site.

These stones were cut in a curious fashion reminiscent of those built into the Aphaia Temple at Aegina.[19] It is suggested that the earlier shrine was destroyed in the earthquake which devestated most of Sparta in 464 B.C., and that the extant remains at the site date from the time of the temple built afterwards to replace the ruined one.[20] The part of Therapnai at which the Menelaion was constructed represents, as far as one may tell from the evidence, the earliest occupied section of ancient Sparta. This would attest both to the antiquity of the worship of Helen at the sanctuary, and to the importance of the cult in the early religion of the area; the site of the Menelaion was typically elevated, and it is possible that the terrace on which it stands was the first acropolis of the prehistoric inhabitants of the Spartan plain.

The pottery found there provides much the same chronological picture as does that from the Orthia sanctuary, with the important difference that the earliest phases there provide far more Mycenean material than do similar levels at the Orthia shrine. Also better represented in the pottery of sub-Geometric date, as there are only a few sherds known from the Spartan sanctuary.[21] The presence of Mycenean pottery in association with buildings of similar date as a foundation for subsequent shrines and votive remains there bears witness to the fact that at Therapnai is manifested a continuous line of cultic worship from Mycenean times on. This is not contradicted, particularly, by the relative absence of Dark Age material at the Menelaion, for this lack

is characteristic of all cult centres where Mycenean origin is attested for the deity worshipped, and is probably more a function of the conjectured widespread poverty of the time than of any lessening in the piety of the worshippers.

The votive offerings uncovered are very like those from the shrine of Artemis Orthia at Sparta, although there is actually a far greater number of figures extant from the Orthia sanctuary. However, the earlier phases are, again, better represented at Therapnai, especially those containing votive gifts dating to about the seventh century B.C.[22] Most of the images are of animals, with less variety in type occurring in the latest levels, at which time deer and cocks were first used as offerings in the form of small figurines. There are also small winged-goddesses, as at the Spartan shrine, and the aegis-bearing lady also appears, although here she is sometimes represented carrying a bow.[23] An interesting type, though not particularly numerous, is the figure of a votary carrying a pomegranate in his hand. The fruit is a very common fertility symbol, especially sacred in the Greek world to Hera, and in the Near East, to the many and various forms of the Mother Goddess worshipped there, such as Cybele, Ishtar, and Astarte.

But the most important of the votive offerings found at the site of the Menelaion are the little figures of horses with what appear to be female riders. They occur in nearly every level, and are quite numerous as compared to other types of gifts. A hoard consisting almost exclusively of these equestrian figurines was uncovered in a small building

adjoining the sanctuary, the purpose of which had not been determined.[24] As has been previously noted, many such images were uncovered during the excavation of the Orthia sanctuary as well. The phenomenon is summarily treated by Thompson in his report on the votives of both sites; he does not go further than to remark upon the oddity of their occurrence.[25] However, it is of fundamental import to this study to note that there is no character or story in Greek myth that has survived which would account for the presence of female equestrian figures in conjunction with the worship of either Helen or Artemis Orthia. The Amazons are too widely separated geographically from the Laconian cults to be connected with them.

In fact, there is no known representation of a rider of either sex in Aegean art until the sub-Mycenean period, when comes a cinerary urn found at Mouliana, and not until quite late in the Greek art of the mainland. Of course, in later myth, the Dioscuri, the brothers of Helen, are always portrayed mounted on horseback. They married the Leukippidae, whose name means "white fillies".[27] The latter term is used again by the poet Alcman in reference to a chorus of young maidens dancing in honour of a goddess, probably Artemis Orthia.[28] But nowhere is there mention of Helen herself mounted upon a horse.

Perhaps a clue to the odd association between such tree goddesses as Helen and Artemis and horses in this context lies in the Persephone parallel to the myth of Helen. Pippin maintains that both Helen and Persephone were vege-

tion deities, a fact which has already been mentioned, and both were in some manner connected with horses.[29] Perithoos was the son of Zeus in stallion form, and thus brother to the centaurs. He was a partner in the abduction of Helen when she was a girl, and in the attempted kidnap of Persephone. Theseus, too, was connected with horses, as a son of Poseidon.[30] A curious myth recounted by Pausanius also connects Helen with a horse; this is in the tale of the oath which Tyndareus required of the suitors competing for the hand of Helen. It is recounted by Pausanius:

> Farther on is the Horse's Grave, where Tyndareus sacrificed a horse and made Helen's lovers swear an oath standing on the cut pieces of its meat: it was an oath to defend Helen and whoever should be picked to marry her against every injury; when the oath was sworn he buried the horse in this place.[31]

Such a practice dependent upon animal sacrifice is a fairly common feature of primitive cultures. Lindsay links the use of a horse to seal the oath with the fact that the vehicle utilized by the Greeks at Troy, many of the commanders of whom had once vied for the hand of Helen, was a wooden horse; he sees the wooden horse as a fulfillment of the oaths since many of the heroes of Troy had joined the Achaean expedition in order to honour their vow to protect Helen.[32] This seems to be stretching the point, since the reference to the horse sacrifice comes from Pausanias rather than Homer, but it is true that horses were rather a rare offering for the Greeks to make. They were expecially acceptable to the chthonic deities, and to Poseidon.[33]

Another female fertility deity with strong connections to the horse is Demeter, again, a goddess with chthonic associations. Poseidon was said to have mated with her in the Peloponnese in stallion form, and there was an image of the Horse-headed Demeter at Philgalia.[34]

The actual significance of the presence of female equestrian figures amongst the votive gifts offered to Helen, goddess of the plane tree, at Therapnai, and to Artemis Orthia, to whom the lygos tree was sacred, at Sparta is rather obscure, but definitely indicates that at one time there was some connection between the horse as a sacred animal and the typical female tree-and-fertility deities who were so widespread a religious phenomenon in prehistoric Greece. No myths survive to account for the connection, but one may conjecture that the motif is associated with the chthonic aspect of such goddesses. The fact that the curious form of votive offering of a female rider occurs at the same stratigraphic levels in two cults of goddesses of this type, Helen and Artemis Orthia, points to a close affinity in their worship.

Both Helen as she was worshipped at the Menelaion, and Artemis Orthia of the Spartan cult were also allied in myth and worship with the old goddess of childbirth, Eileithyia. Helen is recorded as having founded a sanctuary of that goddess at Corinth during the time of her marriage to Menelaus.[35] As previously mentioned, the sanctuary of Orthia stood side by side with one of the goddesses of childbirth,

and votive images, together with tiles stamped with the name of Eileithyia, were uncovered within the shrine of Artemis Orthia at Sparta.[36] The association with both ladies of Laconian cult attests, again, to their common character and derivation, and it is fitting that a goddess concerned with human reproduction should be associated with the worship of deities of animal and vegetal fertility. Also Eileithyia is another "faded" goddess originally worshipped in the Minoan-Mycenean religions, and who was at that time probably tied in with the worship of the Mother Goddess.

Helen possesses attributes common to such deities who are descended from earlier maternal earth goddesses; the votives offered to her are appropriate to a divinity of that type. Amongst the offerings found at the Menelaion were pomegranates of bronze and other materials,[37] bulls' heads, cocks, whose sacrifice is acceptable to the chthonic powers,[38] and deer, particularly sacred to Artemis.[39] However, unlike the Orthia sanctuary, the Menelaion proved to have very few votives in the shape of terracotta masks, so common a feature at the other site.[40] The absence of masks in appreciable numbers indicates either that masks were not used in rituals propitiating the goddess Helen, or else that the dancers or actors dedicated the actual wooden masks used in such ceremonies, rather than clay copies, as at the Spartan sanctuary of Orthia. The latter theory seems less likely, since the archaeologists did not note in their report on the Menelaion such impressions as those they

discovered in the ground at the Spartan shrine which have been left by decayed wooden votive masks.

Regarding the actual rituals involved in the veneration of Helen at the Therapnai sanctuary very little is known. There is mention of a festival celebrated in her honour called the Helenaia, which may, however, provide some clue to her worship on philological grounds. The word "ἑλένη" may mean "basket", and Nilsson suggests that the celebration included the Helenophoria, the carrying of baskets. In the baskets probably were placed offerings and objects sacred to the cult.[41] There also was an herb called "ἑλενάλον", which may have had some part in the proceedings.[42]

That Helen was essentially a tree goddess is manifest in the hymn which Levi considers to have been dedicated to the occasion of the marriage of Menelaus and Helen by Theokritus:

> Fair gracious maiden, housewife now art thou. But we, tomorrow early, will to the course and flowery meads gather fragrant garlands, filled with thoughts of thee, as tender lambs long for their mother's teat. We first for thee will twine a wreath of the low-growing trefoil and set it on a shady plane; we first will draw from the silver flask and let drip the oil beneath that shady plane. And on its bark shall be inscribed "
>
> " "Adore me; I am Helen's tree."[42]

The pouring of libations on a sacred tree or bough is a very common motif in Near Eastern and Minoan and Mycenean art, particularly on seals.[43] The chorus of girls performing the

rite is a feature often associated with the worship of deities such as Artemis.

Helen's mythological biography covers the three phases in the life of a woman - girlhood, bride, and marriage. This is also a feature of the character of Hera as she was worshipped on Samos, and its implications will be dealt with more fully in the following chapter. But the triple nature of Helen is evident in the myths which describe her life. As a girl, she is depicted dancing in the chorus of maidens at the shrine of Artemis Orthia at Sparta.[44] Her marriage to Menelaus is surrounded by the cycle of myths dealing with the dromos of the suitors for her hand and the court of her father Tyndareus. Finally, her turbulent married life is seen in the Homeric sequence on the subject of the Trojan war, and the resolution of the difficulty in her return to her husband depicted in the Odyssey. Finally, the two traditions regarding her death are both tied in with her character as a tree goddess, for she was worshipped as goddess of the holy plane at the Menelaion at Therapnai, site of her burial beside her husband there, while on Rhodes we find the myth and cult associated with Helen δενδρίτης, a hanging goddess.

The presentation of the triple aspect of Helen in this fashion is in keeping with the character of a vegetation and fertility goddess; the phases in the life of a girl are easily related to the seasonal cycle of the maturation of the fruits of the earth culminating in the fall harvest.

The divinity of Helen apart from her portrayal as a rather flawed human woman in the Homeric cycle of myths is continually reiterated in literary references to her, even at quite a late date. Homer accepts her as a daughter of Zeus, and it is by virtue of his position as her husband that Menelaus is given eternal life in the Elysian fields. The Dioscuri, her brothers, are of course accorded divine stature, and in the Orestes of Euripides, Apollo explains that Helen has been made immortal like her brothers.[45] Isocrates categorically states that at Therapnai Helen was worshipped not as a heroine but as a goddess, while Tryphiodorus, a late epic writer, makes an odd reference to her as "ἡ νυμφη θηραπνης".[46] Indications of her power come from both Herodotus and Pausanias; both relate how Helen caused a very ugly baby who was brought to her shrine grow up to be the most beautiful woman in Sparta.[47]

There is also recorded a quite late story regarding the poet Stesichorus, who wrote a poem censuring Helen for her part in the Trojan war, and who was subsequently struck blind by the goddess herself. He then recanted in the Palinode, and his sight was restored. There is little question that Helen was regarded as a divine figure, since such powers were attributed to her.[48] Finally, Isocrates composed a work praising Helen, which accords her the power to aid sailors at sea, and which credits her personally with having elevated Menelaus to the position of a god and partner of her house.[49]

Thus, her divinity is established by ample literary evidence. The manner by which a primitive vegetation and fertility goddess associated with the plane tree entered Homeric saga as the faithless beauty who caused the Trojan war is a problem too complex to be dealt with in the confines of this paper. However, despite Farnell's protestations to the contrary, there is no doubt that Helen was first and foremost a goddess; she was worshipped as such at at least three known sanctuaries in Greece, and the archaeological evidence from the Menelaion attests to the veneration there of a female divinity potent in the realm of animal and vegetal fertility since Mycenean times.[50] The antiquity of the remains at Therapnai contradicts flatly the theory put forward by Coldstream, amongst others, that the sacredness of the site was a function of the development of hero cults on the site of Mycenean ruins during the Dark Ages.[51] As it is stated by Golann, "It is furthermore characteristic of Laconian mythology that old gods tended to become heroes rather than vice-versa".[52]

Her character as a tree goddess is borne out in her continual association with the plane tree and the attendant motif of hanging. This feature is also extended to the two male figures most often connected with her, Menelaus and Agamemnon. Helen's connection with Eileithyia is also a function of this aspect of her character, as is also true in the worship of the other two tree goddesses who are subject of this study, Artemis Orthia and Hera of

Samos. She was portrayed in archaic art as a xoanon-like figure, in keeping with the usual depiction of tree goddesses who represent the transition between aniconic and iconic in such depiction of nature deities.

Notes to Pages 81 to 97

[1]See J.H.S. suppl. (1929) and B.S.A. (1909). The only modern article comparing the two cults is, to the best of my knowledge, one published by J.H. Croon, "Artemis Orthia en Helena", Hermeneus XXXIX (1968).

[2]Pausanias 3:19:9-10; The scholiast on Euripides' Troades calls Therapnai " ".

[3]Pausanias 3:19:10.

[4]Pausanias 8:23:4 (Menelaus); Theophrastus Hist. Pl. 4B considers it to have been planted by Agamemnon; There was a plane of Agamemnon at Aulis, Pausanias 9:19:5; Homer Iliad 2:305f; Boetticher, p. 117.

[5]Dawkins, B.S.A. (1090), p. 109.

[6]Cecil Page Golann, "The Third Stasimon of Euripides' Helena", TAPA 76 (1945), p. 40. According to Golann, this indicates a Minoan myth whereby the female goddess of vegetation is kidnapped by the god of wealth, certainly applicable in the case of Persephone. The chthonic connotations this implies are not out of character for the divine Helen, despite attempts to link her name with that of Selene on philological grounds. Nilsson, in his The Mycenean Origin of Greek Religion, (New York: 1932), p. 185, says this: "We found reason to assume that the rape of Ariadne and the rape of Helen are secularized forms of a Minoan hieratic myth, the carrying off of the vegetation goddess, and are identical with the carrying off of Kore by Pluto."

[7]Pausanias 3:19:10.

[8]Plutarch Thes. 20; also see Nilsson, Geschichte p. 315.

[9]Is this perhaps a female counterpart of the young vegetation deity represented by such figures as Attis and Velkanos? It seems probable, then, that the hanging motif connected with the female vegetation goddess may refer to the manner in which they die, only to be again reborn in the spring.

[10]Pausanias 8:23:4: "A little above the city there is a water-spring presided over by a beautiful and enormous plane tree that they call Menelaus, because they say Menelaus came here and planted the plane-tree beside the spring when he was gathering his army against Troy; nowadays the spring and the tree are both called Menelaus". It seems clear that in a case such as this, the people of the area found it necessary to reconcile their age-old tradition that a tree, connected with a local fertility deity known as Menelaus, stood there beside a spring sacred to him, in the familiar manner of tree deities, with the popular tales of the Trojan War of Homeric saga. Hence, the two traditions were combined to produce the myth outlined above by Pausanias.

[11]Pausanias 8:23:6 Actually, the place is called Kondylea, being some two hundred yards from the town.

[12]Alcman Partheneion, frag. 1 60 (95) sqq. Diehl. (see note 12, p. 77 for the full rendering of this passage.)

[13]Plutarch Thes. 31; Croon, p. 128.

[14]M.N. Tod and A.J.B. Wace, A Catalogue of the Sparta Museum (Oxford: 1906), figs. 38-39.

[15]Merkelbach, pl. 2-4.

[16]Golann, p. 40; also Harrison, Prologomena, p. 323;

[16]Golann, p. 40; also Harrison, Prologomena, p. 323; Dawkins illustrates some reliefs from Sparta which indicate a similar nature for the goddess, B.S.A. (1909), p. 109, also fig. 3.

[17]Pausanias 3:16:11.

[18]Dawkins, B.S.A., "Menelaion", fig. 1.

[19]ibid., Wace, Thompson and Droop, p. 113.

[20]ibid.

[21]ibid., Droop, "The Pottery", p. 150ff.

[22]ibid., Thompson, "The Terracotta Figurines", p. 116.

[23]ibid., figs. 7,9,10.

[24]ibid., p. 124, also fig. 3.

[25]ibid., p. 116: M.S. Thompson makes the remark that "Mr. Farrell's paper on the archaic terracottas from the sanctuary of Orthia naturally applies largely to those from the Menelaion . . .". (The paper referred to was published in B.S.A. xiv, pp. 48ff.) I fail to see why the material and conclusions drawn from that material obtained during the excavation of the Orthia sanctuary in Sparta should naturally pertain in any way to the artifacts uncovered at the Menelaion, a shrine dedicated to Helen. Whatever the assumptions made by the excavators in regard to the two sites, they are nowhere either recorded, or utilized in terms of the possible religious implications of the similarities in archaeological evidence between the two sites.

[26]Jack Lindsay, Helen of Troy, Woman and Goddess (London: 1974), p. 245. He states that the first representation in the art of the mainland may be dated to the Proto-Geometric period.

[27]ibid., p. 245; for the myth see Pausanias 3:17:3.

[28]Alcman Parthenaion; also see Lindsay, p. 95.

[29]Anne Newton Pippin, "Euripides' "Helen": a Comedy of Ideas", CP (1960), p. 163n. "In Spartan cult, Helen was often identified with Kore, since both were associated with a primitive horse goddess. In the celebrations of Helen eidola of winged beasts were carried (Plut. Ages. 19) . . .".

[30]Lindsay, p. 258.

[31]Pausanias 3:20:9.

[32]Lindsay, p. 106.

[33]Charles Segal, "The Two Worlds of Euripides' Helen", TAPA 102 (1971), p. 606n; He lists the literary references to horse sacrifices in ancient Greece, and cites Ziehen, "Opfer", RE 18. 1. pp. 591-592 for a full discussion of the subject.

[34]Pausanias 8:42:1-2.

[35]Pausanias 2:22:7; also see Linda Lee Clader, Helen, The Evolution from Divine to Heroic in Greek Epic Tradition (Leiden: 1976), p. 74.

[36]Pausanias 3:16:11; Dawkins, B.S.A., p. 21.

[37]Thompson, "The Menelaion", p. 130.

[38]ibid., figs 7, 11.

[39]ibid., fig. 11:1-6.

[40]Wace, p. 148. Two votive masks in bronze were found. Also a small riding figure in terracotta; this piece was uncovered in association with proto-Geometric pottery, but it was of such early date as to be considered unrelated to similar material from the Orthia sanctuary, according to Thompson, p. 117. Also, pl. 4, fig. 29.

[41]Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 315.

[42]Ptolemaeus Nov. Hist. iv, cited by Frazer, Pausanias, vol. 3, p. 360; also Golann, p. 39.

[43]Theokritus 18, trans. by A.S.F. Gow, (Cambridge: 1950), p. 358.

[44]Evans, fig. 1.

[45]Plutarch Thes. 31.

[46]Euripides, Orestes 1637f.

[47]Tryphiodorus 520.

[48]Herodotus 6:61; Pausanias 3:7:7.

[49]Isocrates 10:64.

[50]Isocrates 10:61f

[51]L.R. Farnell, Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality (Oxford: 1921), p. 321.

[52]J.N. Coldstream, Geometric Greece (London: 1977), p. 341f.

[53]Golann, p. 40.

V

THE CULT OF HERA AT SAMOS

The final chapter of our study deals with the figure of Hera as she was worshipped at her sanctuary on the island of Samos. She was venerated there as the goddess of the lygos, or chaste, tree (vitex agnus castus), and was accorded the cultic epithet of "Lygodesma", bound with lygos", in reference to one of the rites celebrated in her honour at that shrine. The same epithet pertains to the worship of Artemis Orthia at her Spartan sanctuary, but the aetia and rites of the two cults bear little resemblance to one another.

In character, Hera was much the same type of deity as were Artemis Orthia and the Helen of the Therapnai Menelaion. Guthrie considers her to have been originally a fertility goddess of the Peloponnese, and that her cult spread out from there, radiating from centres such as Argos and Elis.[1] Her function in later Greek religion certainly bears out her similarity to the tree-and-fertility deities of southern Greece, for she was the goddess of marriage, concerned with all aspects of the life of women. Her daughter was Eileithyia, goddess of childbirth, a lady connected both with Artemis Orthia and with Helen. Hera and Eileithyia are prehellenic deities, whose worship is attested in Mycenean times. They were potent in the realm of fertility, both of animals and of man.[2]

Rose comments upon the portrayal of Hera as the wife of Zeus in later Greek myth, and the implications this holds for her original character and derivation:

> Her connection with Zeus is perhaps best explained by supposing that the Greeks on arrival found her cult too strong to be suppressed or ignored, supposing that they wished to do so, and made room for her by making her the wife of their own principled god. It seems conceivable that the persistent stories of the quarrels of the divine pair reflect a faint memory of a time when the two cults were not fully reconciled. That in prehellenic belief she would be very prominent and have either no male partner or none of importance is quite in accord with what is known of early, especially Cretan, religion.[3]

The picture held by Rose of the syncretism between the two systems of beliefs, patriarchal and matriarchal, seems generally feasible in regard to Zeus and Hera, but it is quite clear that in Minoan-Mycenean religion a male consort was paired with the female maternal deity. In the cults of Hera, this is manifest in the persistent feature of the hieros gamos of the goddess and her consort occurring in several of the cult myths associated with her.

The character of Hera as a tree goddess is even more clearly defined in the evidence which has survived of her Samian cult than was true of either Artemis Orthia or Helen. This cult, then, because of the similarities in ritual and myth between it and the worship of both the above-mentioned goddesses, may serve as a source of additional information regarding the nature and function of tree deities in the

Greek world.

The centre for the worship of Hera on Samos was the Heraion, a sanctuary that has been under excavation for some years. The lowest levels reveal the remains of a Mycenean cult place of great antiquity, including the trunk of a tremendous lygos tree, preserved in the ground water beside a plaster altar dating to the Bronze Age. It is evident that Hera herself, (or possibly her divine predecessor at the sanctuary) had been worshipped in association with the sacred lygos in a continual cultic sequence from Mycenean times on, a feature which is very difficult to prove at other shrines of early gods and goddesses because of the notorious break in archaeological remains which always occurs at such sites during the Dark Age phases. There is at Samos no doubt that the goddess of the holy tree had been worshipped for centuries at that site, and that her cult continued in the one attributed to the goddess Hera throughout the Classical and succeeding periods.[4]

This is particularly relevant in regard to the cults of Artemis Orthia and Helen; for Orthia, Mycenean origin may only be conjectured because of the lack of early archaeological material at that site, while Helen's sanctuary, the Menelaion at Therapnai, was firmly founded on Mycenean remains, but it is difficult to prove that she was indeed the same deity who had occupied that shrine during the Bronze Age on any but mythological grounds. The continued presence of a tree

goddess at the Heraion from Mycenean through Roman times suggests that the female fertility deities whose attribute was a holy tree or grove were indeed indigenous to the religion of the early inhabitants of Greece, and probably were related to the Mother Goddess of Minoan and Mycenean religion.

Although the cult of Hera is, if anything, even more fully described in ancient literature than were the rites and myths connected with the other two goddesses dealt with in this study, a certain difficulty arises when one turns to the artifactual remains for the Samian sanctuary. The volumes dealing with the votive offerings unearthed during the course of the excavations at the Heraion have not yet been published. It is therefore impossible to analyze the cult in terms of the archaeological evidence for the character of Hera at that site, a form of study which proved invaluable in the discussion of the cults of Artemis Orthia and Helen, as the reader will recall. Thus, it is left only to consider the worship of Hera on the island of Samos as portrayed by the literary and mythological evidence available to us.

The lygos tree is central to the character and myth of Hera as worshipped at her Samian shrine. She is considered to have been born under the tree sacred to her, to have passed her girlhood in its shade, and to have finally been married to Zeus under that same tree. Thus, the events

of her life associated with the lygos tree correspond to the three phases in the life of a woman which were mentioned in connection with the figure of Helen. This, too, seems a function of the character of vegetation and fertility goddesses who were concerned with fertility of human females. The tree itself played an important role in the rituals connected with the hieros gamos of Hera at her Samian shrine. It is particularly important in regard to the epithet accorded Hera there, "Lygodesma", and the meaning of that title in cultic tradition.

The mythological explanation for this epithet is as follows: at one time, a band of Tyrrhenian pirates attempted to make off with the image of Hera from the sanctuary on Samos. They found themselves unable to row away from the shore to their ship, and, blaming the difficulty on the goddess whose statue they carried with them, returned to the shore. They set the image under a lygos tree which stood there, and departed. The samians searched everywhere for the image of their goddess, and when they had found it, thought that the statue had tried to run away from them by itself. Therefore, they bound the image to the lygos with the fronds of that tree. And ever afterwards, they performed a yearly ceremony in which Hera's xoanon was removed from the Heraion and taken to the seashore, where she was bound to the lygos tree.[5]

There was also a tradition that the xoanon of the goddess worshipped on Samos was not fashioned by human hands,

but found by the inhabitants of the area, who subsequently worshipped it. The tale seems much the same as that connected with the discovery of the image of Artemis Orthia at Sparta.[6] The yearly search for the image of Hera and the reenactment of the myth described above may also have pertained to the latter tradition.

There is some dispute as to the actual nature of the cult festivals celebrated in honour of Hera at her Samian sanctuary. There are recorded the names of two such rites, the Tonaia and the Heraia. Menodotus of Samos, who described the original myth of the Tyrrhenian pirates, says the annual rite referring to it entailed the offering of barleycakes to the bound image, and then its release by a priestess called "Admete", whose name means "unbound". It was then purified and placed on a pedestal in the temple.[7] The poet Nikainetos mentions a similar festival of Hera and says that after the binding of the image to a tree, the celebrants lay on pallets of lygos fronds and indulged in an orgy of drinking and singing. It is also recorded that during the festivities the celebrants wore lygos foliage, while the priestess wore a crown of laurel.[8] Laurel is sacred to both Apollo and Artemis.

Nilsson equates this festival with the Tonaia, the stretching or "binding" ceremony also connected with Hera on Samos. In this rite, the image of the goddess is removed from the Heraion, taken to the sea and washed, and then dressed in bridal garments in preparation for the <u>hieros gamos</u>.[9]

St. Augustine records her consort in this marriage as Zeus.[10] Nilsson also mentions that the offering of barley-cakes at the Heraia indicates a wedding ceremony, since they were traditional nuptial food.[11]

The washing in the sea of the xoanon of Hera may have indicated an annual renewal of the virginity of the goddess. If this is the case, then there is an interesting parallel for the rite in the worship of the oak deities at Platea. There, the oak goddess, a rough plank of wood, was dressed in bridal clothes and carried to the River Asopus to be washed in preparation for her marriage to the oak god.[12] Nilsson attributes the binding of Hera to a holding back of the sexual instinct before marriage, a concept which fits well with the theme of renewed virginity, but which probably attributes to the early inhabitants of the Greek world a level of sophistication in regard to their rituals that they may not have possessed at such a primitive time in their cultural evolution.[13] The explanation for the binding of the image, despite the tale of the abduction by pirates, most likely may be attributed to a similar stratum of cultic development as was the "Lygodesma" epithet of Artemis Orthia. In all probability, the image of the goddess was fashioned out of the wood of the lygos tree, the very tree which was worshipped in the prehistoric period as the embodiment of the potency of the life force in that shrine. Thus, the annual binding was the attempt on the part of the worshippers to ensure that the old sacral connection between tree and goddess

was not completely severed by the removal of the xoanon to the internal sanctuary of the first temple on the site. There is ample archaeological evidence that the initial shrine consisted of a simple outdoor altar, erected beside the sacred lygos tree.

The archaeological remains at the Samian Heraion also serve to shed light upon the original nature of the rites celebrated there in honour of Hera. In the tenth century B.C., there was only an altar and the holy tree in the temenos. Excavations reveal the remains of a cult building of the ninth century to the west of the altar and tree, which are still open to the air. The sacred way runs eastward, towards the River Imbrasos. In the eighth century, there was raised a hekatompedon temple, to the west of the third altar on the same site. A flood level intervenes at this point, and in the seventh century B.C. was erected a peripteral temple. By this time, the altar was on quite a different line of orientation than the temple, and the sacred way now ran southwards, toward the sea instead of the river. A new image of the goddess was set up in the temple, beside the old wooden plank which had represented Hera for centuries. In the mid-sixth century, a portico of Aphrodite and Hermes was built, but was destroyed by fire in 530 B.C. and never totally reconstructed. The final destruction of the sanctuary is attributed to an earthquake which occurred in 260 A.D.[14]

The most important factor here is the change in the orientation of the temple and the sacred way. This

indicates that the original rite of the washing of the goddess and the binding of her image to the sacred lygos must have taken place, not in the sea, but in the Imbrasos River. The Platea ritual of the same type also was carried out beside a river. The daemon and nymph who presided over the Imbrasos were named Partheneios and Parthenaia, a reference to the quality of virginity. Therefore, it seems likely that the washing ceremony necessary for the hieros gamos in order to ensure the virtue of the goddess Hera actually took place first at that river, under the auspices of the spirits to whom it was attributed. Also, the aetion of the Tyrrhenian pirates is nothing more than that, a mythographic explanation for a rite whose original reason had been forgotten.[15] The pirate myth could hardly have taken place on the banks of a small river. However, the initial reason for the alteration in rite and cult festival has to date received no satisfactory explanation.

It is attested that the original image of the goddess Hera, a βρέτας or ξοανον, as is usual for a tree goddess, was considered especially sacred by the people of Samos, and that even after they had received an anthropomorphic statue of the deity, they still worshipped the old aniconic one, side by side with the more sophisticated image in the temple.[16] It seems that the "Lygodesma" rite was performed with the older image throughout most of the history of the cult, and that a new image was only made under King Prokles, in the mid-seventh century, by a sculptor named Smilis.[17] It is

probably his statue of the goddess which is recorded in the Samian coins illustrated by Merkelbach in which the figure of Hera is portrayed with chains or lygos fronds hanging from her hands. This latter is, as we have seen, a characteristic motif for bound goddesses.[18]

The rituals concerned in the Tonaia festival included the procession from the city of all the men of military age in full battle dress. The seventh century peripteral temple mentioned was decorated with a frieze of this procession.[19] We are told, in fact, that it was during this festival that Polykrates, a tyrant of Samos, and his brothers took possession of the city, since the defenders of Samos were absent.[20]

This latter aspect of the cult of Hera may provide a clue to the meaning of the small votive offerings found at both the shrines of Artemis Orthia and of Hera in the form of armed warriors, and the warrior masks uncovered at the Spartan sanctuary of Orthia. If there was connected with the worship of tree goddesses in general some martial characteristics, such as these votives would suggest, then it is possible that the warrior procession in the cult of Hera at Samos was a product of the same sacred motif. Thus, one might suggest that tree goddesses were concerned not only with fertility, but were also propitiated as warrior goddesses, a factor certainly in keeping with Mycenean religious precepts. The cult of Athena of the Athenian acropolis, at once goddess of the olive and of war, is a case in point.[21]

That the other attributes of Hera were similar to those displayed in the worship of Artemis Orthia, Helen, and the other goddesses of Greek cult concerned with animal and vegetal fertility and connected with the tree cult is borne out by the discovery at the Heraion of Numerous small votive figurines in the shape of animals. Votives of this type are typical to cults of such deities. There were also images of horses included in the material uncovered, but, because of the unavailability of a full site report dealing with the votive offerings found during the excavation of the Heraion, there is no record of whether the archaeologists brought to light any equestrian figures, such as played so prominent a role in the worship of Artemis Orthia at Sparta, and of Helen at Therapnai.[22]

Hera is traditionally an Argive goddess, as is made clear by her support of the Greeks at the siege of Troy. Groten makes the point that the continual epithet of Helen in the Homeric works is "Argive", indicative of a strong relationship between that goddess, too, and the city of Argos.[23] This may well suggest that the two female deities were at one time associated with one another, or at least were worshipped by the same group of people in the earliest period of their cults. Their similar character and function would also attest to the possibility of such a religious phenomenon in the prehistoric period.

Hera is herself one of the vegetation and fertility goddesses whose special attribute was the sacred tree, in her

case, the lygos tree. This is borne out by both her mythic character, and by the archaeological evidence from the Samian Heraion. She was the goddess most concerned with the life of women, and was the mother of the goddess Eileithyia, who governed the realm of childbirth. Hera's cult at the Heraion may be traced back to Mycenean times, even to the discovery of the remains of her sacred tree enclosed in material of Mycenean date. The connection with the sacred tree indicates that Hera was a similar type of divinity to both Artemis Orthia and Helen, although her sphere of influence and function in Classical mythology is somewhat altered and circumscribed by the Homeric mythological framework which surrounds the figure of the wife of Zeus.

However, this latter aspect of her worship may preserve a very early feature of Greek cultic development, for the hieros gamos ritual is continually reiterated in reference to Hera, and usually Zeus. This Rose considers to represent the synthesis which took place between the maternally-oriented religion of the Mediterranean world, and the patriarchal astral system brought by the migrants from the North into the Greek world. However, the sacred marriage of the high god and his consort may also be, in the case of Hera, a characteristic motif associated with a descendant of the old Mother Goddess figure of Minoan and Mycenean religion; in the latter case, a male consort of the female deity would probably be some sort of vegetation god, who would be subordinate in power to the goddess whom he marries.

The three goddesses here discussed, Artemis Orthia, Helen of Therapnai, and Hera of Samos, represent a type of female fertility and vegetation goddess common in the early religion of the Greek-speaking peoples. The ladies, all related to the concept of a maternal earth goddess who is connected with the sacred tree, and who is manifested most clearly in the figure of the Minoan and Mycenean Mother Goddess, are the descendants of deities with similar functions who were scattered throughout the Greek world in the prehistoric period. They represent the survival in later religion of these ancient divinities.

The attributes and characters accorded the goddesses betray their primitive origins; Artemis and Hera are in these cults tree goddesses who are bound with the foliage of the tree sacred to them, while Helen, like another lady of similar heritage, Ariadne, was connected with the very primitive fertility motif of hanging. All three were offered votive gifts pertaining to their potency in the realm of faunal fertility, and all were closely allied in worship with the goddess of childbirth, Eileithyia. Artemis Orthia and Helen were also connected with the sacred image of the horse, although the exact meaning of the little equestrian votive gifts offered them at their sanctuaries remains obscure.

Both Helen and Hera are represented in myth specifically in terms of the three phases of their lives, relating to the three major phases in the life of a woman. The sig-

nificance of this aspect of their characters is probably two-fold; they are both deities concerned with human fertility, and the phases may also relate to the cycle of the seasons. Regarding the former factor, the three phases emphasized in the lives of the goddesses correspond to the development on the part of a woman towards the optimal age and condition - marriage - for childbearing. This, too, may be regarded as an allegory for the transition of the seasons from planting to harvest. A similar motif is to be seen in the characters of the two major female fertility deities of Classical myth, Persephone, and her mother, Demeter.

The sacred tree is a survival in later Greek religion of a very primitive stage in the evolution of nature worship in the Aegean. The tree cult has proven remarkably tenacious throughout the various phases in such development of belief. It began in the veneration of the life principle inherent in all living things, including the largest example of vegetal nature, and remained even in the most sophisticated mythological and ritual system devised by the Greeks at the peak of the cultural advancement. In the latter stage, the tree came to be regarded as a symbol of each and every deity of the Classical pantheon, with the exception of Hestia, herself hardly an anthropomorphic expression of divinity.

The longevity of the motif attests to the unique appeal of the tree as a sacral image. To ignore the tree cult in a study of early Greek religion is to neglect one

of the fundamental phases in the development of such belief, and a potent motif in Classical and later cult in the Greek world.

[1]Guthrie, p. 72.

[2]Pausanias 1:18:5 attests to the Minoan origin of Eileithyia; also see Nilsson, Minoan-Mycenean Religion, p. 74; Malten, p. 199.

[3]H.J. Rose, "Hera", O.C.D., pp. 412-413.

[4]Walter, p. 14, also pl. 6. He illustrates the trunk of the lygos at the Heraion as it was discovered in the Mycenean layers; Nilsson, Minoan-Mycenean Religion, p. 472.

[5]Athenaeus 15:672 quotes Menodotus of Samos; Kipp, p. 158.

[6]Manolis Andronikas "Samos: The Heraion" in Evi Melas, Temples and Sanctuaries of Ancient Greece (London: 1970), p. 180.

[7]Athenaeus 15:672; Kipp, p. 158.

[8]cited by Kipp, p. 159; Boetticher, p. 29.

[9]Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 429. Nilsson States also that the festival was carried out like a wedding ceremony. He equates the Tonaia with the festival of Hera described by Varro, sqq. Lactantius Inst. div. 1:17:8; see Kipp, p. 160n10.

[10]St. Augustine de civ. 6:7.

[11]Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 429.

[12]Frazer, Golden Bough, vol. 1 pt. 2, p. 140; Pausanias 9:3:1. He tells us that the origin of the rite was connected

with Hera herself. She was angry with Zeus, so he dressed up a piece of wood as Plataia, daughter of Asopos, and said he was going to marry her. Hera discovered the trick and was reconciled with Zeus. The element of the sacred marriage is typical of tree deities and the myths surrounding them.

[13]Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 430.

[14]Walter, pl. 23, 26, 32, 33, 39, 45, 66; also, "Samos", Princeton Dictionary of Classical Sites (Princeton: 1975), p. 802; M.I. Finley, Atlas of Classical Archaeology (London: 1977), pp. 179-180.

[15]Kipp, p. 159; Burkert, p. 144; Ath. Mitt. (1979), p. 46 discusses the nymph and daemon of the Imbrasos.

[16]Farnell, Cults of the Greek States, vol. 1, p. 205; Aethlios of Samos, F.G.H., III B, 536, fr. 3 cited by Levi in his translation of Pausanias, Guide to Greece, vol. 1, (Harmonsdworth, Middlesex: 1971), p. 237n24.

[17]ibid.; also Pausanias 7:4:4.

[18]Merkelbach, pl. 3, 4 fig. 15.

[19]"Samos", Princeton Dictionary of Classical Sites, p. 802.

[20]ibid.

[21]Dawkins B.S.A. (1909), fig. 9, 10.

[22]Walter, pl. 21, 37.

[23]F.J. Groten, "The Traditions of the Helen Legend in Greek Literature", dissertation Princeton, (1955), p. 68.

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