

"Men have no knowledge, only hearsay" - Hellenic Religion and Philosophy

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Like Hellene culture, Hellene religion traced its roots from Minoan and Mycenaean civilisations although, according to Herodotos,

Almost all the names of the gods came into Greece from Egypt. My inquiries prove that they were all derived from a foreign source, and my opinion is that Egypt furnished the greater number. For with the exception of Neptune and the Dioscuri, whom I mentioned above, and Juno, Vesta, Themis, the Graces, and the Nereids, the other gods have been known from time immemorial in Egypt.¹

Along with the becoming Olympian gods, Minoan and Mycenaean religion consisted of local fertility and chthonic cults² and service of the ancestors³. Cretan religious map was actually a mixture of eastern and western traditions and Ionia was perhaps more part of the East than part of the West. Thus, it is no wonder why it was through these areas that eastern religions influenced Hellene thought. Moreover, it must be remembered that both Homeros and Hesiodos were Ionians. Thus, they lived in a different cultural atmosphere than mainland Hellenes.

In spite of these early roots, their function was different and the organisation of pantheon in Classical period differed from that of early times. Herodotos mentions that "Homer⁴ and Hesiod were the first to compose Theogonies, and give the gods their epithets, to allot them their several offices and occupations, and describe their forms⁵." In Hesiodos' version, the development of pantheon was expressed in the form of genealogy. If we look behind the text, we can note that it is a story how chthonic gods were replaced by Olympian gods.

¹ Hdt II:50.

² Furuhagen (1983, 156ff.) argues that both in Delphi and Olympia there were old caves in which Gaia was served. He also argues that the legend of victory over Python (which was commemorated in the principal feast of Apollon, Pythian games) tells actually that as a foreign missionary religion, cult of Apollon replaced that of Gaia and her son Python circa 800 BC (similarly Graves 1981, 17). I deal this more later but it is interesting that Herodotos (Hdt. 2. 54-58) locates the origin of Hellene oracles to Egypt and religion of Ammon (whom he calls Zeus).

³ On Hellenic ancestor cult, see the classical Fustel de Coulanges' *Ancient City* (1874) and its chapters 1-2.

⁴ However, Homeros' theology was that of the 'great tradition'. He does not even mention gods like Démétér or Dionysios, who were gods of the common man. It was only in the democratic Athénai where these gods of lower classes became central. (Furuhagen 1983, 150f.)

⁵ Hdt 2.53.

Although Hesiodos' work systematised the pantheon, Hellene religion remained 'multi-voiced': it had no commonly accepted dogma, it had not similar priesthood that existed in Egypt, Levant and Mesopotamia, it had even no sacred texts although Homeros' and Hesiodos' poems later got almost canonical status⁶. Every *polis* had its own tradition, different classes had their own traditions, every family had its own family tradition, and there were numerous religious sects and cults⁷ that partly complemented and partly competed with the civil religion of each *polis*.

Hellenic religion can, according to Vernant, be divided into three major modes of expression: mythology, rite and figurative portrayals. These were "verbal, gestural, and iconic" manifestations of "this religious tradition that was neither uniform nor strictly defined; its nature was not dogmatic in any way⁸." Along with Vernant's triad, we can add philosophy as a fourth form of religious thought.

Along with local variety, Hellenic religion also changed during the relatively short interval of Hellenic culture. Vernant argues that

Between the eleventh and eighth centuries, technical, economic and demographic changes led to what the English archaeologist Anthony Snodgrass called the structural revolution which gave rise to the city state (*polis*). The Greek religious system was profoundly reorganized during this time in response to the new forms of social life introduced by the *polis*. Within the context of a religion that from then on was essentially civic, remodelled beliefs and rites satisfied a dual and complementary obligation. First of all, they fulfilled the specific needs of each group of people... Every city had its own divinity or divinities whose functions were to cement the body of citizens into a true community... Second, the development of an epic literature cut off from any local roots, the construction of great common sanctuaries, and the institution of pan-Hellenic games and panegyrics established and reinforced, on a religious level, legendary traditions, cycles of festivals, and a pantheon that would be recognized equally throughout all of Hellas.⁹

Although all poets functioned as harmonisers of tradition, it was only Homeros' and Hesiodos' works that unified Hellene mythological tradition. Along with Athénai's and Sparté's occupations local traditions gave way to these canonical interpretations although there has remained 'sectarian' texts¹⁰ that depart from this main tradition. In general, as Vernant states, "Greek religion presents an organization so complex that it excludes recourse to a single reading code for the entire system."

⁶ Andrewes 1977, 254f.; Furuhausen 1983, 145; Vernant 1987, 100.

⁷ Although today sociologists of religion speak more about new religious movements than sects and cults, I would like to use the old concepts as *termini technici*. With 'sect' I mean those religious minority groups that have splitted from some established religious group of the society and are in opposition to it. A typical example is Orphism that emerged in the middle of sixth century. With 'cult', I mean those minority groups that are not grown out of society's own religiosity but are of foreign origin. Thus, many philosophical schools could be seen as 'sects' in this respect while service of Isis in Hellas was a foreign cult. However, it must be underlined that many sects and cults (like that of Apollon) became part of the established polytheistic civil religion.

⁸ Vernant 1987, 99, 102.

⁹ Vernant 1987, 105.

¹⁰ Especially Orphic texts give a different cosmogony from that of Hesiodos.

"In truth at first Chaos came to be"¹¹ - Hellenic Cosmology

HELLENIC MYTHS¹², contrary to fairytales, locate themselves to some historical moment and to some place. In this sense, they can be seen as one sort of collective history¹³. However, myths are not only sacred history. They were also important part of civil religion and collective identity. Paul Cartledge has argued that 'Greekness' emerged along with the Persian Wars. It was the shared experience that led Hellenes see themselves as same people. Now, when much of the mythology was collected and edited after this period, there is also much propaganda in mythology. When Walter Burkert states that "myth is a traditional tale with secondary partial reference to something of collective importance"¹⁴ he points not only to historical facts of the society but to their understanding. Myths are, thus, a collective frame of community's past. Both their content and interpretation depend on the generational experiences of the time of their emergence, canonisation, edition and interpretation. For example, Charles Freeman argues that "the singer [or poet who tells *mythoi*] may draw on folk memories but his songs will also be shaped by his audiences"¹⁵. Singer's living depended on his ability to keep his audience interested hour after hour. When a story gets so popular that it is asked again and again, it reaches coherence and "there may be a moment when it becomes part of the cultural heritage of the community, and then there is a strong impulse to preserve it in a more stable form for future generations." This is the moment when an editor, like Homeros collected the material, improved it and added connective passages.¹⁶ Jan Bremmer, in turn, notes that myths had different function for Archaic and Classical Hellenic periods (explanation

¹¹ Hes.The 116.

¹² These myths were first presented orally by *mythoi*, poets, who preserved the oral tradition and presented them in festivals. Homeros and Hesiodos were the first who collected and edited these myths in literal form. After them, myths were important material in Hellene dramas and comedies as well as the point of departure of Hellene philosophy. In each stage, the author of drama or book edited and utilised the pool of mythology. Therefore, there is always some "taste of the pot" (saying based on 2 Cor 4:7) when authors aimed to advance their own political or intellectual purposes.

¹³ Already in 300 BC., Euhemerus explained that Ouranos, Chronos and Zeus were ancient kings (Parada 1999a, b). Along with Euhemerism, also others have interpreted Homeros' poems allegorically. Philosopher Thales (ca. 640-546 BC.) was the first to apply this method on myths and was followed by Theagenes of Rhegium, Hekataios, Crates of Mallus (who explained entire text of Homeros), Cynics and Stoics (Vernant 1987, 100; 1990, 218-222). Accordingly, Zeus was interpreted as life-giving power (name deriving from *zen*), Ares meant war, Hephaestus fire, etc. (Mowry 1980, 82). Although there has been numerous other models for interpretation of myths (See Parada 1999a), allegorism has remained significant explanatory model of mythology. Many modern explanations of human life, like, for example, those of Freud's, can be seen just modifications of the allegorical method. Thus, from this perspective, myths are historical narrations from pre-literate era that explain either historical events or powers of nature.

¹⁴ Quoted in Bremmer 1987, 1.

¹⁵ Freeman 1996, 87.

¹⁶ Freeman 1996, 87f.

of the world and their history) and to that of Hellenes during the Roman period (collective identity)¹⁷.

In general, according to Carlos Parada, "the Greek historical legends extend from ca. 1900 BC to ca. 1000 BC (the Roman extension of the myths overlaps the Greek and may be said to cover the period from ca. 1200 BC to 550 BC)¹⁸." Thus, comparing the mythical history with archaeological findings, the earliest legends from 1900 BC are from the time when first Cretan palaces were built. Parada also argues that

the destructions of Thera and of Minoan and Cycladic sites (1500-1450 BC) correspond in mythical chronology to the myth of the flood in the age of Deucalion. The fall of Cnossos in 1400 BC and the expansion of Mycenaean power coincides with the myths of the foundation of Mycenae by Perseus and of Thebes by Cadmus, and with a certain migration or invasion from the Peloponnesus to Crete recorded by the traveller Pausanias, which in mythical chronology corresponds to ca. 1400 BC.¹⁹

The end of Mycenaean civilisation and collapse of Hittite empire around 1200 BC parallels with the destruction of Troy in mythical chronology²⁰. It is also this period when the Sea People attacked Palestine and Egypt. Thus, the myth on contest of Athena and Poseidon for Attica²¹ might well be a reminiscent of the attack of Sea People to Achaia. Evidently they were repelled since the capital remained Athénai and not Poseidonia²².

Some time during the sub-Mycenaean (or Proto-geometric) period (1100-800 BC) occurred the return of the Heraclides and colonisation of Ionia. It was also this period when Hellenic alphabets occurred. Some kinds of milestones in transition from mythical age to historical age are the date of the first Olympiad in 776 BC and works of Homeros (775 BC) and Hesiodos (750 BC) who turned the oral tradition into literal.²³

THEOGONY in Hellenic mythology had both similarities and differences to Mersopotamian and Egyptian ones²⁴. A similarity is that in all three areas, theogonies describe how the cosmos was transformed from chaos to order. Another is that, especially like in Egypt, there is not one Hellenic theogony but several that are partly in contradiction. The third is that there are many similar elements in all traditions.

¹⁷ Bremmer 1987, 5

¹⁸ Parada 1999b. See also Parada 2000b.

¹⁹ Parada 1999b.

²⁰ Parada 1999b; 2000b; 2003.

²¹ Apollodoros 3:14,1; Hdt. 8:55. On the myth, see Parker 1987,198-204.

²² Athénai was actually one of the few centres that remained unscathed in Attica (Freeman 1996, 82f.). Thoukudides' (Thuc I:2.5-6) states that "Attica, from the poverty of its soil enjoying from a very remote period freedom from faction, never changed its inhabitants." Thus, it seems that this part of land got fewer attacks than more fertile parts, which, according to Thoukudides (Thuc I:2.1-2) under a constant pressure of invaders.

²³ Parada 1999b; 2000b; 2003.

²⁴ On comparison of parallels, see Burkert1987.

Hellenic gods can be divided into three main groups. First, there are the primordial gods that were involved in giving birth to the world. Second, there were the twelve Olympian gods - those that are in modern everyday language understood as The Hellenic gods. Finally, there were numerous more or less important gods attached to various places and themes²⁵. When deities are both personalities and physical realities, their interaction means some sort of continuous creation. New phenomena and new royal families are explained as offspring of gods.

The oldest written Hellenic presentation of theogony comes from Homeros who, in his *Ilias*, present Okeanos and Tethys²⁶ as the primordial divine couple and parents of other gods²⁷. This version differs from Hesiodos' version, which make Chaos as the origin of everything. However, this contradiction may be partly overcome if we adopt the idea that both Homeros and Hesiodos utilised Mesopotamian cosmogonic traditions. As noted above, in Babylonian *Enuma Elish* this chaos was a primordial couple of Apsu (god of subterranean waters) and Tiamat (god of salt waters) whose waters were mingled. They were in the same time both Okeanos and Tethys and Chaos. Also, as we saw in Egyptian mythologies, Nun was a formless ocean.

The Homeric idea of Okeanos as the father of all beings has been repeated by early Miletian *physikoi*²⁸ and by both Platon²⁹ and Aristoteles³⁰. According to Jean-Pierre Vernant, "in Greece as in many other cultures, this 'primary' value accorded to aquatic powers derives from the twofold nature of fresh waters: first, their fluidity and absence of form predispose them to represent that original state of the world in which everything is uniformly submerged and confused into a single homogeneous mass; and, second, their vivifying and generating virtue - life and love evoke the wet

²⁵ "More or less important" should be read literally since while some local gods were evidently less important, there also were local gods and heroes whose cults were more important to local people than those living in Olympos.

²⁶ Details of the Homeric cosmogony are obscure. Okeanos was the river streaming round the earth from which all streams start and to which they also end. His sister and wife, Tethys (in Hesiodos' version), was daughter of Ouranos and Gaia. Their children were Oceanids (sea nymphs) and river gods like Nile, Danube and those living in rivers of Hellas. According to Jean Rodhardt (1991, 379), "Tethys is a mass of water that cannot be distinguished from the course of Oceanus itself, but she is female, equally animated and personal." Okeanos and Tethys is an old couple that had for long ago ceased to sleep together, i.e., ceased to reproduce and live in peace in a remote place. On Okeanos and Tethys, see Konstan 1987; Vernant 1991, 366f.; Rodhardt 1991, 379f.; Parada 1998, Oceanus; Murray 1998, 22f., 145f.

²⁷ Hom.II 14:200, 246. Orphic cosmogonies replace Okeanos with Nyx (Night) as the first being (Vernant 1991, 367).

²⁸ Aristoteles (Aristot.Met 983b,20; 948a,1) mentions that Thales, in his philosophy, made water the principle from which all things arose. On Thales' theology, see Jaeger 1968, 20ff., 198f.

²⁹ "Ocean whence sprang the gods, and mother Tethys, does he not mean that all things are the offspring, of flux and motion? (Plat.Theaet 152e. See also Plat.Crat. 402b. and Plat.Theaet. 180c,d.)" Below we will see that according to Hesiodos (Hes.The 134) Okeanos was a son of Gaia and Ouranos. The genealogy is partly harmonised by Platon in his Timaeos, where he makes Chronos and Rhea as children of Okeanos and Tethys (Plat.Tim 40e). Murray (1998, 23) supposes that Homeros' tradition is older reflecting the wide held belief among eastern people.

³⁰ Aristoteles, in his *Metaphysics*, refers to Ionian monistic school founded by Thales and (according to comment of H.M. Fowler) to Platon (Aristot.Met 983b,20-948a,1; idem 983b, note 3.).

element for the Greek - implies that they hold in their womb the principle of successive engenderings³¹."

The idea of wetness is not only significant from the point of view of cosmogony. In Hippocratic corpus, the wetness of - especially women - is a significant aspect of anthropology. Thus, as will be shown later, it has consequences on both equality questions and health care.

Another early written cosmogonic text is from Hesiodos, who also utilises much Oriental mythology in his *Theogony*³². In *Theogony*, there are three stages of cosmogony, which equal to stages of creation, shifts in divine dynasties and establishment of social order. In the same time, it is the story of Zeus³³ ancestors, family and status as the king of gods³⁴ who resided in the Mt. Olympus³⁵. Hesiodos' poem describes the standard understanding of Hellene cosmogony. In many ways, it's basic idea resembles those of *Enuma Elish* or Egyptian legends where Marduk or Horus seize the power from earlier generations of gods.

Hesiodos follow the Oriental theogonies, and state that at the beginning there emerged Chaos³⁶ and after him Gaia, (Mother Earth), Tartarus (Underworld), Nyx³⁷, Erebus (Darkness of the Underworld) and Eros (Love)³⁸. Through their interaction whole Cosmos come to be³⁹.

³¹ Vernant 1991, 366f.; Parada 1998, Oceanus;

³² Raaflaub 2000, 35ff. Walter Burkert (1987, 19) notes that "the Hittite text that has been called 'Kingship in Heaven' offers parallels to Hesiod's *Theogony* so close in outline and details that even sceptics could hardly object their connection."

³³ According to Room (1997, 308) the name Zeus "contains the root for 'sky' or 'day' in a number of languages... More importantly, his name is 'god' itself, as in Latin *deus*... In addition, there have been attempts to associate his name with *zao*, 'to live'. Aeschylus was a supporter of this origin."

³⁴ Olympian gods were: Zeus (Roman Jupiter), his wife, Hera (Roman Juno), Pallas-Athenaé (Roman Minerva – goddess of victorious battle and the following prosperous peace, patroness of Athénai), Hephaistos (Roman Vulcan – god of volcanic activity), Ares (Roman Mars – god of war), Aphrodite (Roman Venus – goddess of sexual love), Apollon (sun-god, patron of prophesy, healing and intellectuality), Artemis (protector of animals), Démétér (Roman Ceres - goddess of corn and fertility), Hestia (Roman Vesta - goddess of hearth), Poseidon (Roman Neptunus - lord of the sea) and Hermes (Roman Mercury - divine messenger, . Dionysos (Roman Bacchus - god of vine and ecstasy) sometimes replaced Hestia in the old lists. Robert Graves (1981, 19) links this to the overcome of patrilinearity over matrilinearity. Close connected to these 12 gods were also Persefoné (daughter of Démétér) and his husband Haides (Roman Pluto - god of underworld).

³⁵ There are also traditions that link Zeus to Creté (Hes.The 453-491 - Zeus' mother Rhea escaped Creté and gave birth to Zeus there), Egypt (Hdt. 2.42 - Zeus is Ammon; Aes.Supp 1 - Danaids fled Zeus' land = Egypt; Apollod. 1.6.3./Ovid.Met 5.321ff. – Olympian gods flee Typhaon's power to Egypt) and Ethiopia (Hom.II. 1.386 - banquet of gods in Ethiopia; Hdt. 2.29 - oracle of Zeus in Meroe, Ethiopia; 2.146 - birth of Dionysos in Nysa, Ethiopia; 7.61 - Zeus' son, Perseus married with Ethiopian-Egyptian princess Andromedé). Maghan Keita (1994, 149-153) links these kinds of passages to those myths, which tell about Egyptian-Ethiopian origins of some Hellene tribes and argues that these show the the origin of Hellene religion being in Ethiopia.

³⁶ Hes.The 116; Also Aristophanes (Aristop.Birds 690) follow this tradition.

³⁷ Aether (upper luminating Athmosphere) and Hémera (Daylight) were born from Night (Hes.The 124). Jean-Pierre Vernant (1991, 369) emphasises the pairing of opposites: Chaos - solid Earth, infernal darkness Erebus - Aether, and Nyx - Hémera.

³⁸ Hesiodos (Hes.The 116-123) does not actually say how Gaia, Tartaros and Eros emerged. He does not even say that they emerged out of Chaos. However, Erebus and Nyx came forth from Chaos. Morris Jastrow (1898, 413) mentions a theory "according to which the [first Mesopotamian] gods were contemporaneous with primeval chaos." Thus,

In one sense, when gods were both divinities and physical or mental realities, this can be seen as some sort of classification of phenomena. One basic distinction in Hesiodos work is between Nyx' and Gaia's offspring when other first generation gods play minor role in the genealogy of phenomena/gods. Another system of classification is then made in the form different generations of Gaia's offspring.

Among Nyx' children are 'mental' realities like Apaté (Deceit), Thanatos (Death), Nemesis (Messenger of Justice), etc. Also her grandchildren (through Eris) are similar: Battles, Disputes, Famine, Murders, Sorrows, etc⁴⁰. From the coupling of Nyx and Erebus were born both Hemera (Day) and Aether (Upper atmosphere).

Gaia, in turn, represents material world. She gave birth to Ouranos (Sky), Pontus (Fruitless Deep) and Mountains. Of these, Ouranos was regarded as equal to her mother, since, as Parada says, "for as the gods have in her sure standing-place, they have in Uranus, a secure resting place⁴¹."

Although Gaia had intercourse with Typhon and Pontus, it was through her coupling with Ouranos that most significant phenomena emerged⁴². Of their offspring, Cyclopes, Hecatocherires and Titans, the last group was most influential. Especially important were Chronos⁴³ and Rhea, whose offspring were the Olympian gods Démétér, Haidés, Hera, Hestia, Poseidon and Zeus.⁴⁴

Like in Mesopotamia, it is only after the enthroning of a younger god that stabilises order in the world. When in Babylon it was Marduk who slaughtered Tiamat and monsters she had made, in Egypt it was fight between Horus and his uncle, Seth⁴⁵. Here occurs an interesting difference to Eastern mythology. It is not, like in East, according to theme of a son revenging the murder of his father but, instead, son overcoming his father. Both Ouranos and his son and follower Chronos are

there is a possibility that Hesiodos would have followed a variant of the legend.

³⁹ Carlos Parada (2003, Genealogy) argues that "according to the myths, the world - the universe or cosmos - does not come into existence as the result of the work of a constructor, a demiurge, or a god-creator, but through love and intercourse."

⁴⁰ It seems that, although Hesiodos did not know the Durkheimian concept of social fact, he was familiar with the idea.

⁴¹ Parada 1999 (Gaia)

⁴² Here Hellene thinking differs from Mesopotamian and Egyptian. While in Orient heaven and earth (Anshar and Kishar in Babylon, and Shu and Nut in Egypt) were couples, in Hellas there was incest between mother Gaia and her son Ouranos. Incest, in general, was a common phenomenon among Hellene gods.

⁴³ Like in the case of Egyptian gods, the local function of him differed from that in the whole culture. According to Alexander Murray (1998, 29ff.) Chronos was originally a harvest god whose main sancruary was in Krété. He also states that "as the devourer of his children Kronos bears some resemblance to the Phoinician Moloch, and it is highly probable that this phase of his character originated in Krété where the influence of Phenician settlers had been felt from very remote times." On Chronos, see also Parada 2003, Chronos.

⁴⁴ Hes.The 126-158, 453-58. Parada 2002 (Hesiod's Theogony)

⁴⁵ Robert Mondí (1990, 179-187) links the story of Tiamat in *Enuma Elish* and Hellene stories of Typhaon together under the theme "The Threatening of the Cosmic Order." However, although there were similarities, the basic difference was that Mesopotamians were afraid of sea (floods) while Hellenes were frightened of volcanic activity. In Egypt, there were neither threads. Thus, the Egyptian equivalence to threat of this cosmic order is Seth, who was

represented as despotic rulers who depressed their offspring and brothers. Both were overcome with coup d'etat with the help of temporary allies - who were soon overcome as well. In these revolts, wives of these rulers, Gaia and Rhea, act through her sons against their husbands and help the coup d'etat. Finally, one of Chronos' own sons, Zeus took the power and established the Hellenic pantheon of the 12 Olympian gods.⁴⁶

It was only after Zeus' coronation that there emerged some sort of order. Zeus' first wife, Metis, resembles Egyptian *Ma'at* and "Zeus her into his own belly first, that the goddess might give for him both good and evil." The names of daughters with his second and third wives are revealing. Themis' daughters are Horae (Hours), Eunomia (Order), Dike (Justice), and Moirai (Fates - Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos) who give men their share of good and evil. Eurynome's daughters are Charites (Graces - Aglaïé, Euphrosyné and Thaleia).⁴⁷ Thus, order, justice, charity, etc., come from Zeus who is guided by Metis in his belly.

It is tempting to go along with Euhemerus and see Ouranos, Chronos and Zeus as representatives of succeeding dynasties or cultures. If these myths represent the general understanding of Hellenic 'sacral history', there would appear to be a story that tells how the Cretan agricultural culture replaced the earlier hunter and gatherer culture - and was, again replaced by Mycenaean culture. It also tells how the turbulence of the dark ages was slowly replaced by some sort of order.⁴⁸

In any case, in these stories we find some characteristics that legitimise Hellenic lifestyle. First, 'there is no peace in heaven' - gods are fighting and plotting against each other and making temporary alliances to gain benefits. Ouranos and Cronos are despotes whose rule rests solemnly on power and oppression. There is nothing like Mesopotamian (or Egyptian) council of gods. In this sense, Hellenic heaven resembled Homeros' description of the time of Trojan war where a meeting of nobles is incapable of securing the heritage of Odysseus' son Telemachos but leaves him on the mercy of his mothers suitors⁴⁹. Second, family ties are almost non-existing. The only bonds, that seem to be permanent, are mother-son relationships. Third, there is no divine rule like the *Ma'at* of Egypt that would, at least, restrict the actions of selfish gods although Metis has similar characters than *Ma'at*. Fourth, gods are far from monogamous and not afraid of incest. However, there seem to have been a shift from Gaia's polyandry to Zeus' polygyny with the shift of power from Titans to

identified to Typhaon (Peck 1898 s.v. Typhon)

⁴⁶ Hes. The 155-180. An interesting variation of the Egyptian Osiris' penis myth is Ouranos' penis that Chronos cutted and cast to sea and from which grew Aphrodite.

⁴⁷ Hes. The 885-910.

⁴⁸ On the other hand, as Jastrow (1898, 411-421) notes, there have been similar generations and battles in the pantheon of Mesopotamia, as well

⁴⁹ Hom. Od II:25-259; Raaflaub 2000, 32f.

Olympians⁵⁰. Fifth, as Jaeger underlines, "the Greek gods are stationed *inside* the world; they are descended from Heaven and Earth... thus they are already subject to what we should call natural law⁵¹."

IONIAN PHILOSOPHERS built on this mythological basis. Mythology the point of departure of Hellene philosophers' reasoning of the source of everything, or the first principle. While borrowing Oriental myths and fables, Hellenes recognised their contradictions. When poets like Hesiodos started to collect and systematise the tales in narrative form, Ionian philosophers started to make questions of these *mythoi* and rationalise the secrets of *kosmos*. Contrary to general construction of Ionian natural or physical philosophers as rational atheists, Jaeger argues the opposite:

To translate the word *fysis* by our word 'nature' or *fysikos* by 'natural philosopher', fails to do justice to the Greek meaning and is definitely wrong. *Fysis*...denotes quite plainly the act of *fynai* – the process of growth and emergence... but it also includes their source of origin... in other words, the reality underlying the things of our experience.⁵²

The physical philosophers of Ionia emphasised two things that became constant phenomena in Hellene philosophical thinking. First, their view shifted from the legends of far away gods to those present in everything. The first of these philosophers, Thales⁵³, argued that "everything is full of gods." As Jaeger explains Thales' thinking, gods "must be something that can be seen with the eyes and grasped with the hands." Second, these philosophers rejected Hesiodian idea of birth of gods but claimed that the Divine was eternal – not only in the future but in the past as well. Thus the Divine was something that had been and will be always – it is the first principle. For Thales, the water was the source of everything. For his pupil, Anaximander, the source of everything was *apeiron*⁵⁴, "the endless, inexhaustible reservoir or stock from which all Becoming draws its

⁵⁰ Polyandry should not be fused neither with matriarchy, matriliney nor matrilocality although there is an old debate about prehistoric matriarchy since the publication of Johann Bachofen's *Das Mutterrecht* in 1861 and Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society* in 1877. On the prehistoric matriarchy, see Lefkowitz 1986, 15-29; Ehrenberg 1989, 63-76, 109-118; Blundell 1995, 17ff.

⁵¹ Jaeger, 1968, 16.

⁵² Jaeger 1968, 20 (my italics in place of the original Hellene alphabets).

⁵³ Thales, first of the seven sages (Paus. 10.24.1; Plat. Prot. 343a.) was born c. 640BC. from Phoenician parents and was educated in Egypt and Near-East. (Durant 1951, 142)

⁵⁴ Other physical philosophers argued that the first principle was air (Anaximenes, Diogenes and Archelaos), fire (Heracleitos and Hippasos) or earth (Empedocles, Xenophanes). (Aristot. Met 983b-984a,17; Justinus III; Hippolytus X.). In the two last cases, we can identify Hestia and Gaia as sources of everything.

nourishment⁵⁵” as Jaeger puts it. *Apeiron* is immortal and indestructible since it is the Boundless. All other things are derived from it.⁵⁶

Now, when we compare Thales’ water and Anaximander’s *apeiron* with Oriental cosmogonies, it is rather easy to see that both are similar to Sumerian Nammu, premordial sea and source of everything and Egyptian Nun, the abyss without limit from which everything came and to which everything would dissolve. In all these, it is the endless and shapeless water that is the source of everything. This dependence on Oriental models is further emphasised by Anaximander’s way of speaking countless *kosmoi* (worlds) and calling them gods that arise from *apeiron*⁵⁷. Thus, actually, there was not much difference between Oriental thinking and Ionian philosophy.

PLATON built his theology/philosophy on the same basis. Platon’s philosophy was part of his theology. One starting point to Platon’s theology is stated in his *Timaios*⁵⁸:

Now if so be that this Cosmos is beautiful and its Constructor good, it is plain that he fixed his gaze on the Eternal; but if otherwise (which is an impious supposition), his gaze was on that which has come into existence. But it is clear to everyone that his gaze was on the Eternal; for the Cosmos is the fairest of all that has come into existence, and He the best of all the Causes. So having in this wise come into existence, it has been constructed after the pattern of that which is apprehensible by reason and thought and is self-identical. Again, if these premises be granted, it is wholly necessary that this Cosmos should be a Copy of something.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Augustinus (Aug.CG. VIII,2) explains that Anaximander “thought that each thing springs from its own proper principle. These principles of things he believed to be infinite in number, and thought that they generated innumerable worlds, and all the things which arise in them. He thought, also, that these worlds are subject to a perpetual process of alternate dissolution and regeneration, each one continuing for a longer or shorter period of time, according to the nature of the case.”

⁵⁶ Jaeger 1968, 20-25, Durant 1951, 140-145.

⁵⁷ Jaeger 1968, 33.

⁵⁸ Simo Knuuttila (1982, 363) has described *Timaios* as “a philosophic cosmogony that interprets the results of natural sciences of its time and, in some respects, even s study of new natural science theory [my translation from original Finnish text].”

⁵⁹ Plat.Tim 29a-b.

This idea that the world is a copy of some intelligible and immutable form is fundamental in Platon's theology/philosophy. It is fundamental in two senses. First, Platon traces his cosmogony from this thesis. For Platon, Hesiodos' four races⁶⁰ were four periods. Like Hesiodos, Platon sees the world as a history of devolution from the early ideal, golden era, to his own, degenerated iron era. This thinking lies behind his philosophy of ideas. Platon was rationalist but not empirist. His rationalism was based on pure knowledge as opposed to knowledge based on empirical observations. With observations, one can see only corrupted reality, not the original ideas that still existed during the golden era. However, observations are important in the sense that there are remnants of the idea even in the contemporary existing forms. Now, it is the task of philosopher to trace back from these corrupted forms to the original idea.

As we have seen above, the idea that a manifestation is a corrupted form of the ideal, existed already in Egypt and Mesopotamia⁶¹. For Christian church fathers it was easy to combine Platon's theses of corrupted ideas with Biblical story of the Fall. In both, the pure original had become corrupted.

Second, Platon saw the empirical world as imperfect image of the divine idea. In this, Platon followed the Ionian physical philosophers in their views that nature was divine. According to M.B. Foster,

nature as modern rationalism sees it, is devoid both of mystery and of God. But for Plato the rational is the divine. Man's reason is the divine element in him, and the intelligible is the divine element in nature. Thus his rationalism expels mystery from nature, but not divinity.⁶²

According to Luc Brisson, in Platon's thinking "as a poetic product myth is but an image of images of intelligible forms that are perceptible things." They can neither claim universality on the ontological level nor distinguish truth from error on the epistemological level. Therefore, although myths are valuable, they "have to be transformed in terms of very strict moral requirements" as Brisson interprets Platon.⁶³

TO SUM UP, Hellene myths were distinct from fairytales because they located themselves to some time and place. They were meant to be understood as common understanding of theogony, anthropogony and history of the particular *polis* or *oikos*.

⁶⁰ See below on Devolution myths.

⁶¹ Kákosy (1995, 6f.) notes that there is still a debate whether Platon visited Egypt or not. He notes that "although it could be argued that Plato acquired his knowledge through hearing and hearsay, it is highly probable that he did indeed visit Egypt." He backs his thesis by noting that Platon's disciple, "Hermodoros mentions Plato's travels to Megara, Cyrene, Italy and Egypt." Moreover, Egyptians (according to Ryland Papyri II no 63) believed that Platon studies there.

⁶² Foster 1951, 215.

⁶³ Brisson 1991, 353f., 356.

Hellene theogony grew out from its eastern predecessors. Mythical stories were told by wandering poets, *mythoi*, who coloured their stories according to the needs and values of their audience. With the emergence of writing, first Homeros and then Hesiodos systematised the pantheon of Hellene thought in the form of genealogy. In principle, there were three kind of gods. First, there were primordial gods who were related to the creation of the world and then withdrew from the world. Especially they resembled those described in Babylonian *Enuma elish*. Second, there were 12 Olympian gods of whom some existed already in Minoan mythology. Their role as leading gods of Hellas was due to Homeros' contribution. Finally, there were numerous local gods and heroes who were attached to particular location or family. Rather often these gods played a significant role as being the forefathers of certain tribes.

Like in eastern mythologies, the primordial chaos-water was a source of everything. After Chaos emerged Gaia, (Mother Earth), Tartarus (Underworld), Nyx (Night), Erebus (Darkness of the Underworld) and Eros (Love). It was through their coupling that other gods were born. Like in *Enuma elish* and in Egyptian mythology, there was a fight between generations and this fight ended when Zeus along with Olympian gods took power. Thus, the emergence of physical powers of the world were explained in the form of theogony. In the same time, the history of the world was described as a devolution from the original perfect situation.

Ionian physical philosophers continued from this basis. The main difference to mythologists was that philosophers rejected the idea of birth and growth and argued the divine being eternal. Also Platon departed from the same grounds. For him, the starting point was the divine idea from which all visual items are corrupted copies. Also he accepted the idea of devolution which was stressed already in old Egyptian thinking.

“The earth-born race⁶⁴” - Hellenic Anthropology

Origin of human, in general did not interest Hellenes⁶⁵. Instead, according to Nicole Loreaux, they were concerned with the specific ancestor for a particular city. Therefore, Hellenes had several myths of their origin. Some legends emphasise the aboriginality of especially population in Attica while some, like Herodotos and Diodorus trace the roots of some parts of the population from Egypt, Ethiopia Libya and Syria. Moreover, some legends tell how Hellenes rob wives from Syrian and Egypt. Thus, there are three kinds of legends. First, there are myths concerning ages of man or devolution myths that explain how the humankind has degenerated from the golden race of the beginning to the present iron race.. Second, there are autochthonous myths that describe the emergence of Hellenes fro the Attican soil. Third, there are those that could be called immigrant myths. They trace the descendance of their ancestor from gods (Zeus, Nilus, Poseidon, etc.) via other people, like Egyptians, Ethiopians, Libyans or Phoenicians. Carlos Parada argues that "most royal houses can be traced back to three ancestors: Atlas, Deucalion and Io⁶⁶." Below, I deal with the descendants of Io as an example⁶⁷. However, Parada also notes that

The Athenians do not belong originally to any of the mentioned primary families. They were the children of Gaia, or else "sons of the soil."⁶⁸

DEVOLUTION MYTHS, contrary to modern evolutionist myths, portrait the human world as a constant degrading. According to Hesiodos, there were five human races that generation by generation degenerated from some sort of Paradise to present cruelty. However, he also implicitly say that there will be some kind of recovery of the Golden Era.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Pla.Sta 271a.

⁶⁵ In Homeric Hymn to Apollo (3.35) and in Orphic Hymn to Titans (3-7) there are mentioned that humankind emerged from Titans. Zagreb (another name for Dionysos) myth tells that when Titans had dismembered, boiled, roasted and eaten the baby Dionysos (except his heart whic was saved), Zeus in anger destroyed them with his thunder. Then, from their ashes mankind was born. However, as Radcliffe Edmonds (1999, 40) has shown, this myth was a construct of sixth century AD Neoplatonist Olympidorus who presented it in his commentary on Platon's *Phaidros*. He notes that "although no other ancient author connects the murder of Dionysos and the creation of mankind, many scholars have assumed that this story was the central secret dogma of Orphism from earliest times." This paradigm begun with D. Comparetti's excavation report of the Thurii golden tablets in 1879 (idem. 39). Walter Burkert (1987, 24) points to the parallel in *Enuma Elish* where mankind is created from the body of defeated Kingu, consort of Tiamat. Thus, in both stories humans are created from the bodies of defeated enemies of the ruling gods, Marduk and Zeus.

Apollodoros mentions that "Prometheus moulded men out of water and earth (Apollod. 1.7.1)." This tradition is repeated by Pausanias (Paus. 10.4.4), Ovidius (Ov. Met. 1.78-87) and some other late writers. In a comment to Apollodoros' citation above, James G. Frazer reminds: "It is to be observed that in the earliest versions of the legend (Hes. Th. 510ff. Hes. WD 48ff.; Aesch. PB) Prometheus appears only as the benefactor, not the creator, of mankind." Thus, it is possible that here can be seen Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultural influence.

⁶⁶ Parada 1997, *Three Ancestors*.

⁶⁷ On descendants of Atlas and Deucalion, see Parada 1997, *DescendantsAtlas; DescendantsDeucalion*.

⁶⁸ Parada 1997, *Three Ancestors*.

⁶⁹ On the ages of man, see Parada (2004).

Hesiodos tells that first gods made the golden race of mortal men who, in the time of Kronos, “lived like gods, without sorrow of heart, remote and free from toil and grief; miserable age rested not on them; but with legs and arms never failing they made merry with feasting beyond the reach of all evils⁷⁰.” According to Ovidius, it was the constant season of spring. Carlos Parada notes that “the golden Age appears as a lost paradise which has been associated with the irretrievable reverie of childhood: it is a state of innocence, purity, freedom and simplicity⁷¹.” When the members of this generation grew old and died, they became “pure spirits dwelling on earth” who help and guard mortal men. Ovidius links the end of Golden Age, as he calls it, to the dethronement of Saturnus (Kronos) by Juppiter (Zeus).⁷²

Up to the beginning of the next age, most gods had moved from earth to heaven. Only Diké remained there. The second generation of men was the silver race and was not created by the first gods but by the Olympiads⁷³. This race was “less noble by far... they could not keep from sinning and from wronging one another, nor would they serve immortals, nor sacrifice on the holy altars of the blessed ones.” These misbehaviours were also the reasons why Zeus “put them away.”

According to Ovidius, they could not anymore enjoy constant spring but faced four different seasons, ceased to live in caves but built houses and started to cultivate the land. Platon, in turn, locates the emergence of civilization to this period: humans who did not any more have gods as their guardians were helpless and should learn new skills that Hephaestos told them. It was also during this pre-civilized period when Prometheos gave the fire and other gods grain and other plants. According to Hesiodos, this generation, after its death “are called blessed spirits of the underworld by men, and, though they are of second order, yet honor attends them also.”⁷⁴

The third generation was of bronze and “they loved the lamentable works of Ares and deeds of violence.” It is during this age when Diké leaves the earth. Members of this generation “were destroyed by their own hands and passed to the dank house of chill Hades, and left no name: terrible though they were, black Death seized them, and they left the bright light of the sun.”⁷⁵

After the bronze race, there emerged⁷⁶ “nobler and more righteous, a god-like race of hero-men who are called demi-gods.” However, this does not mean that it was peaceful. On the contrary, this was the time of Theben and Troien wars. While some of the heroes died in these wars, “to the

⁷⁰ Hes. WD 109-116.

⁷¹ Parada 2004 (I. The Ages of the World). Platon (Plat.Sta 271d-272b), in turn, gives a description that is very similar to Biblical descriptions of Garden of Eden.

⁷² Hes. WD 109-127; Ovidius 1.114.

⁷³ Hes. W&D 127ff.; Plat.Tim 69c.

⁷⁴ Hes. WD 128-141; Ovidius 1.114-124; Plat.Sta 274c-d.

⁷⁵ Hes. WD 141-155; Ovidius 1.125ff.

others father Zeus the son of Cronos gave a living and an abode apart from men, and made them dwell at the ends of earth. And they live untouched by sorrow in the islands of the blessed along the shore of deep-swirling Ocean.”⁷⁷

The last of the races is the iron race, our time, who “never rest from labor and sorrow by day, and from perishing by night; and the gods shall lay sore trouble upon them.” Hesiod gives a list of misbehaviours of this race and summarises: “there will be no help against evil.”⁷⁸

In general, this fable has many similarities to Oriental ones and one can suppose that, like in the case of *Theogony*, Hesiodos has utilised Oriental myths also in his *Works and Days*. Compared to *Genesis*, there is similar tale of the paradise and expulsion from there. Compared to *Gilgamesh Epic*, there is the idea of the Island of the Blessed. And compared to Egyptian mythology, the roles of *Ma'at* and *Diké* are quite similar.

PLATON'S ANTHROPOLOGY took its depart from his cosmology: what we see is not the real but an image of the real. The centre of human being is his soul, that the Demiurg gave for gods as a starting point in their task to create a man. Platon divides the soul into three parts. First, into immortal rational (*logos*) and mortal irrational species. The latter is further divided into irascible (*thymos*) and lustful (*epithumia*) subspecies. These parts of the soul live in special parts of mortal body: *logos* lives in the head, for higher ideals oriented *thymos* lives in the chest and vulgar volumptuous *epithumia* lives in the lower body.⁷⁹

The immortality of the soul can also be seen in the doctrine of metempsychosis that he got from Pythagoreans. According to Platon, humans were created as men but those “men who proved themselves cowardly and spent their lives in wrong-doing were transformed, at their second incarnation, into women”⁸⁰.

ESCHATOLOGY of the Hellenes was seen mainly in the hope that the golden age of Kronos would come back. Hesiodos wishes that he “either had died before or been born afterwards”⁸¹. This statement gives three possibilities for the future. First, there might be some sort of eschatological recreation, a sixth generation, like in Persian and Israeli myths. Or there can be a palingenesis or cyclical recurrence like in the yearly cycle⁸². Second, as Ovidius propose, there might be a

⁷⁶ This period is only in Hesiodos' work.

⁷⁷ Hes.WD 156-169a.

⁷⁸ Hes.WD 174-201; Ovidius 127-150.

⁷⁹ Plat.Tim 69a-70d.

⁸⁰ Plat.Tim 90e-91a.

⁸¹ Hes.WD 175.

⁸² Verg.Ecl. 4.4.; Vernant 1983, 34f., 57-64.

pendulum movement, when ages re-emerge in reversed order⁸³. Platon, in his *Statesman* presents third version of this motion. He says that God keeps the world moving to one direction but sometimes leaves it to function by its own and, then, the movement is reversed until God again takes care of it and reverses its motion to the purposed direction. A modern metaphor would evidently be a spring (or rubber in kids' model plane) which is first tightened and then let loose.⁸⁴ This hope of Kronos' kingdom coming back concerned the immanent world – like in the Jewish thinking where the kingdom of Messiah would be on earth. In general, Hellenes had not such elaborated view of the afterlife as their southern and eastern neighbours and, except some mystery cults, there was no idea of pious entering to transcendent paradise⁸⁵ – except in the poetry. The Eleusian fields, (Garden of) Hesperides, Fortunate Isles or 'life under Kronos' – nearest equivalencies to Oriental Paradise – was reserved to ancient heroes and for the elect ones but not for pious commoners. It is in this utopian kingdom of Kronos where the race of heroes “untouched by sorrow in the islands of the blessed along the shore of deep-swirling Ocean⁸⁶.”

Along with this cosmological eschatology, there was always the individual eschatology as well. Carlos Parada summarises the Hellene views on this as follows: “life and death are qualities of existence, not lack of it⁸⁷.” Jon D. Mikalson notes that “for many modern students of the Greeks, conceptions of the Greek afterlife have been shaped by the famous account of Odysseus' encounter with the dead in Book 11 of Homer's *Odyssey*⁸⁸.” Another source is Vergilius' *Aeneis* which described the mythical forefather of Rome⁸⁹. These two stories contained the Hellene views of the afterlife.

Mikalson argues that according to “the non-poetic sources, Greeks foresaw no meaningful existence after death.” He backs his argument with the almost total lack of hopes of afterlife or fears of punishments in the Hellene tombstones. Although there are such expressions as ‘house of Haidés and Persefoné’ the other poetic features of underworld, like “the river Acheron, the ferryman Charon, or the dog Cerberus.”⁹⁰

⁸³ Ov.Met 15.249.

⁸⁴ Plat.Sta. 269a-274d

⁸⁵ Mikalson (2005, 191f). argues that the absence of belief in the afterlife is seen in the tombstones which only “very rarely, and then only formulaically or uncertainly” certain expressions of expectations in the afterlife.

⁸⁶ Hes.W&D 170ff.

⁸⁷ Parada 2003, Underworld & Afterlife.

⁸⁸ Mikalson 2005, 190.

⁸⁹ Vergilius' influence in western thought has been enormous since Dante Alighieri names Vergilius as his guide in his *Divina Commedia*.

⁹⁰ Mikalson 2005, 190-193.

According to de Coulages, the general belief was that the soul lived in the body also after the death. If the body was not properly buried, the soul wandered as a ghost among the living and haunted in seeking its peace. With proper burial the soul could rest in peace in the grave where the bones were. The grave was the house of the deceased and it was there where (s)he used the gifts that were offered to her/him. Thus, the view of the afterlife was that both the body and soul remained in the peace of land where the grave situated and the existence continued there.⁹¹

However, as could be expected in a culture which does not have religious dogmas, views of afterlife were not limited to those described above. Along with the idea that the deceased rests in the tomb, there were descriptions of Haidés and Persefonés' kingdom. Perhaps the best known belief was the idea that Kharon the ferryman transported the deceased over the river Styx. Since the deceased had to be able to pay to Kharon, Hellenes had a custom to put a silver coin into the throat of the body – it was meant to Kharon's payment.

Mystery religions offered a bit similar access to a better afterlife than Oriental religions promised. This was done either by granting the initiated a knowledge how to enter to Eleusian fields or how they can avoid drinking from the well of forgetting before they reborn on earth⁹². In both cases, it was rather the knowledge/mercy given in initiation rite than pious life that rescued from shadowy life in Haidés.

Although Hellene mysteries may have drawn ideas from Egypt, they also transformed the idea. Thus, while Egyptian concept of divine judgement was primarily transcendent⁹³ and took place after the death, in Hellas the moment of initiation was the moment of judgement. Initiates were 'reborn' and new life started from initiation and lasted to eternity. Thus, while the initiation focused to the afterlife, there was a significant immanent aspect in them in Hellas.⁹⁴

One form to frame afterlife was transmigration of souls. In his *Republic* Platon has combined this belief to popular beliefs of Haidés and Eleusian fields in the story of Pamphylian hero Er.

According to this story, Er has awoken in a place where there was two holes in the ground and two in the heaven. Between these, there were judges who signed the fates of the deceased. The righteous entered to heaven and the wicked to Haidés where they suffered ten times the evil they had caused to their victims on the earth. After serving their punishment time, they re-entered the hall and were able to enter to pastures of heaven. The souls remained seven days in the pastures but on the eight

⁹¹ De Coulages 1920, 10-16.

⁹² The Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis is referred in Platon's *Timaios* (Plat. Tim 90e-92c).

⁹³ The possible exceptions are the masonry cults of Deir-el-Medina and later Hellenistic syncretistic cults.

⁹⁴ Griffiths 1982. Although Griffiths' comparison is valuable, she was rightly criticised already in the conference where she presented her paper that she did not pay attention the later Orphic influence on the Eleusinian and Dionysian mysteries. She looks the mysteries from the second century AD Isis and Osiris cult perspective.

day they moved to the hall of Anake, necessity, where also Moires (destinies) were. There they were given a lot of order to choose and they chose the incarnation of their next life. After choosing, they were led to the banks of river Ameles where they had to drink a certain amount of water. Those who drank more, forgot everything of their previous life. In the next midnight souls were transferred to their next incarnations.⁹⁵

“They sacrifice to Hestia first⁹⁶” - Hellenic Cult

Like Mesopotamian and Egyptian religious cult practices, Hellenic cult can be divided roughly to three partly overlapping spheres. Domestic cult, official cult (Great tradition) and voluntary cult (Small tradition). However, in the case of Hellas, the *polis* entered to the fields of household and voluntary cults making them part of the civil religion of the state.

DOMESTIC CULT was the religion of the father of the house. According to Fustel de Coulanges it was transmitted from a man to man and women could take part in it only through their relative men⁹⁷. In this respect it was more patriarchal than Oriental practices⁹⁸. However, other practices we find rather familiar from our treatment of Mesopotamian domestic cults⁹⁹.

According to de Coulanges, all Hellene houses had an altar with a fire. It was called *bómo*, *eskhara* or *hestia*. The last, Hestia¹⁰⁰, became dominant and is better known as goddess Vesta in Rome.¹⁰¹ This hearth should always have some ash and glowing coals and it was the duty of the master in the house to maintain that fire/glow was present day and night. According to him, extinguished fire meant the same as extinct of the family.¹⁰²

⁹⁵ Plat.Rep.614b-621b.

⁹⁶ Pausanias 5.14.4.

⁹⁷ De Coulanges 1920, 40.

⁹⁸ Although Oriental domestic cults were patriarchal, in general, there are exceptions that show also women as tradition carriers. Perhaps the best known example are the words of Rút to her mother-in-law Naomi when she accompanied her after the death of Rút's husband: “Your God is my God (Ruth 1:16)” that is sometimes used in Christian wedding ceremonies.

⁹⁹ De Coulanges (1920, 20, 28f.) follows the old thesis that early Hellenes were Aryan immigrants and links Hellene, Roman and Etruscan domestic cults with those of India. Also Mondì (1990, 154) notes this link. Jean-Pierre Vernant and Jaques Gernet (1990), in turn, find similarities in Chinese and Hellene thinking from sixth to second century BC. In the light of Algaze's Sumerian world system theory, this is not so strange idea as it may seem. On fireplace and lamp in Mesopotamian domestic religion, see van der Toorn (1996, 128ff.)

¹⁰⁰ In Hellene Mythology, Hestia, the first-born of Olympiades, never leaves her home, Olympos, and never take part in the struggles of men and gods. Although proposed by both Apollo and Poseidon, she decided to remain maiden with permission of Zeus. Probably she was one of those few gods that did not come from Egypt but was aboriginal. On Hestia, see Vernant (1983, 127-175), Room (1997, 158f.), Parada (1998); Murray (1998, 71-75).

¹⁰¹ De Coulanges 1920, 508, n 48.

¹⁰² De Coulanges 1920, 23.

De Coulages argues that the fire in the altar was holy. Actually, the hearth *was* the family god¹⁰³. This meant that it should be treated accordingly. It should receive offers. It was prayed. It was the place of refuge¹⁰⁴, like all altars in Hellas. Nothing impure was allowed there¹⁰⁵. The purity was so strictly guarded that it had to be hidden from the sight of visitors since stranger's looks made it impure. Moreover, even sexual intercourse of the couple was not permitted near the fire since the fire symbolised purity.¹⁰⁶

Hestia represented stability and she is actually the one that makes the home. Vernant argues that the poets sometimes identified Hestia to Mother-Earth because of her immobility. He also make some other notes that are linked to similar beliefs that are related to the roles of people in the *oikos*. In general, the home is woman's place and man is the centrifugal element in the household. However, in marriage, the roles are reversed: it is the woman who moves and the man who stays in his home – with Hestia. Thus, according to Vernant, Hestia carries the old idea of autochthonous birth that the two first male generations presented. Hestia is the true 'housewife' and the married 'foreign wife' is only a supplicant. Vernant argues that "this dream of purely paternal heredity never ceased to haunt Greek imagination¹⁰⁷." The idea of *partenogenesis* is underlined also in the practice that it was the special task of the unmarried daughter¹⁰⁸ to keep the fire alive like virgins of Vesta later in Rome.¹⁰⁹

Through her role as the true matriarch of the family, Hestia cult was related to another domestic cult, service of the forefathers, *patriazein*. Deceased forefathers were *theoís khthonioís* (underground gods) and graves were their houses. The special feature in the cult was that – contrary to idea of locality in the form of *demos* – it was strictly bound to blood-kinship. According to de Coulages, it was believed that deceased took offers only from hands of relatives. Non-relatives' (even friends') attendance was forbidden – even touching the grave of someone else than your relative, was seen as a violation of purity-code. In earlier times, family graves were located in the farm, near the entrance of the house so that, as the sons could always address their deceased fathers when they enter the

¹⁰³ Vernant (1983, 131) underlines that Hestia was not the fire (it was the male, often not-so-pure Hephaestus) but the hearth altar.

¹⁰⁴ E.g. Thoukydides 1.136.

¹⁰⁵ This meant that, for example, there was clear rules which kinds of wood were allowed to burn there and that burning waste material could not be destroyed there.

¹⁰⁶ De Coulages 1920, 24-33, 38f.

¹⁰⁷ Vernant 1983, 134. According to him, this is openly stated in Aischylos' *Eumenides* (Aesch. *Eum.* 658-61): "The mother of what is called her child is not the parent, but the nurse of the newly-sown embryo. The one who mounts is the parent, whereas she, as a stranger for a stranger, [660] preserves the young plant, if the god does not harm it. And I will show you proof of what I say: a father might exist without a mother."

¹⁰⁸ Vernant (1983, 131) refers to Louis Deroy's argument "that the word *parthenos* (virgin) is a functional designation denoting she who tends the fire."

house¹¹⁰. It was in these graves that deceased should be buried – even those fallen in the battle-field and it was in these graves where the family gathered to commemorate their beloved. According to Furuhagen, these graves had a pillar with Sphinx-figure¹¹¹ on top and relief of the deceased.

Another form of burial memorial was a statue of a couple in a festival table.¹¹²

Like in Orient¹¹³, the deceased were seen as having influence on the living. Therefore, they should be satisfied by offers. There was, thus, similar reciprocity than in Mesopotamian religion: the death ones helped the living and received food offerings. The fate of the deceased depended on the acts of the living. Only those who were commemorated could enter Elysion, others had to wander in the shadows of Haidés¹¹⁴. If deceased did not get their meal and proper ceremonies, they ascended from their graves and started haunting and tease the living.¹¹⁵

The centrality of forefather-cult in Hellene thinking had an effect on the warfare as well. As noted above, first international Hellene laws dealt with the treatment of dead bodies of the fallen warriors¹¹⁶. Since it was the duty to bring them back to their family-graves, opposing generals broke hostilities from time to time in order to collect the bodies. Diodorus Siculus even tells that two victorious Athénain navy generals “were condemned to death and their property confiscated” because they “had allowed men who had gladly died on behalf of their country to go unburied¹¹⁷.”

GREAT TRADITION in Hellas focused on sacrifice to state gods and on memorial of the fallen warriors. Along with these, each town had its own founding mythology. A special element in Hellenic cult was the respect that they paid on hearth. As seen above, in Prometheos myth, fire in the altar had several meanings. First, it linked humans to gods. Second, it separated humans from animals. Fire was a symbol of civilization.

The hearth of sanctuary was the altar of the god. It was the point where the god was served. Jon D. Mikalson shows how the early sanctuaries consisted only an altar under open sky with a sacred area, *temenos*, around it surrounded by a low fence that would keep the wandering cattle away.

¹⁰⁹ Vernant 1983, 128, 133f.

¹¹⁰ Eur. Hel 1165-1169. Furuhagen (1983, 148) argues that during Dark Ages deceased were buried under the floors of the houses. From the eight century on, they were buried outside the *polis*.

¹¹¹ Stephen Scully (1997) in his review article on Charles Penglase (1997) argues that “it is not the Egyptian, but the Mesopotamian Sphinx, perhaps reaching Greece through Syria, which we find in Mycenaean art” since the Egyptian sphinx was a male without wings while Hellene Sphinxes had similar wings as female Mesopotamian ones.”

¹¹² Furuhagen 1983, 177f.

¹¹³ See van der Toorn 1996, 42-65.

¹¹⁴ According to Furuhagen (1983, 149f.), it was only later than entering Eleusion was seen as a reward and Haidés was framed as a place of punishment.

¹¹⁵ De Couloges 1920, 19-23, 34-40; Furuhagen 1983, 148f.

¹¹⁶ Low 2003, 99f.

¹¹⁷ Diod. 13.101.1-7; Powell 1988, 197.

Everything that was located inside this *temenos* was sacred and property of the god. It was inviolable. To steal or remove something from there was a cardinal crime. It is from the Hellenic word *asylia* “not to be stolen” from which the word asylum comes from. It was not the fence but god who protected the sacred area.¹¹⁸

Burning offerings (*thusia*) to celestial gods were made on the altar on open sky. Only certain parts of the offer was burned (bones, flesh) but the meat was delivered to the participants - like in Egyptian tradition¹¹⁹. Thus, the offering both established a link to gods, separated humans from animals and integrated participants with the *polis*. The nutritional significance of the offerings is underlined when we are told that the meat eaten in these ceremonies was all the meat the Hellenes had in their diet.¹²⁰

Offerings to chthonic gods were given without that participant ate any parts of the offering. The ceremonies took place during the night time and it was believed that the rite opened the way to underworld. In the rite the throat of the offer was cut, its blood poured into a hole in the ground and the rest of the body was burned.¹²¹

Contrary to Phoenician and Cartage practices, Hellenes did not practice human sacrifice in spite that it was a popular theme in drama¹²². However, even in it, human sacrifice is said to be a practice of someone else than Hellenes or done in extreme condition – and then seen as wicked. Albert Henrichs summarises the Hellene attitude as follows: “ritual killing is something which uncivilized men inflict upon one another but which no Greek in his right mind would ever contemplate¹²³.” It was only in the eight century when there emerged a need for building houses for the treasures of the god¹²⁴. First they were simply wooden houses inside the – now enlarged – *temenos*. Later they were built of marble or other stone. These treasures were made of dedications given to the god. Not only they increased the property of the god but proclaimed his/her power since they were gifts from ardent servants who paid tribute to the benevolence of their god. Along with marks of victory –

¹¹⁸ Mikalson 2005, 5ff.

¹¹⁹ In Hellene mythology, it is said that Prometheus established the offering and divided the parts which were given to gods from those consumed by men (Hes.The 535-558).

¹²⁰ Vernant 1987, 109f.

¹²¹ Vernant 1987, 108f.

¹²² Best known are Aeschulys' *Ifigenia* and Plutarchos' description of the sacrifice of three Persians before the battle of Salamis. Henrichs (1981), however, shows that pre-Aeschulian versions of Ifigenia myth contain an animal representative in the sacrifice and that Plutarchos report (Plut. Them 13.2-5) is based on the imagination of Phainas whose story lies behind Plutarchos contribution

¹²³ Henrichs 1981.

¹²⁴ Finley (1977, 133) argues:” “though the temple had been common in the Near East for two thousand years, it had been so rare and insignificant in Bronze Age Greece that we may properly speak of it as an innovation now.” Starr (1977, 36ff.), in turn, argues that it was due to the economic growth of the sixth and fifth centuries that led to the emergence of the large temple buildings.

weapons of the defeated enemies - there were all sorts of other gifts. Among them were also statues of the god. While smaller statues were held in the treasure house, the enormous ones got their own building, *naos*, the temple. The *megaron*, the cella, was the main room where the statue was placed and it was the home of the god. Although situated inside the *temenos*, the *naos* was not the centre of the sanctuary complex. The centre was the altar and the space around it where the servants of the god could gather together.¹²⁵

In these sanctuaries, there was, in principle, three kinds of religious activities. First, there were private prayers, promises and dedications concerning health, wealth, fertility and security. However, the most important activities were public offerings which were integral part of the civil religion of each *polis*. Along with offerings in great festival days there were also other activities in honor of the deity. Drama and athletic games are the most famous of these activities. For these activities, certain temples had adjoining facilities near the sanctuary (for example, theatre besides the sanctuary of Dionysos in Athens and stadium near the altar of Zeus Olympios in Olympia). It was only in some special sanctuaries, like Delphoi, where (mostly upper-class) people went to receive omens.

Like in family-cult, Hestia had her central place in the *polis*-cult as well. According to de Couloges, all offerings, whether they were to Zeus or to Athéné, started and ended with a prayer to the hearth, Hestia, who did not have an own sanctuary¹²⁶. Like the family gathered round the *oikos*-Hestia, the body of citizens gathered round the *polis*-Hestia. The sacred fire also had an important role in Hellene colonialism. It was an established practice to light a torch from the hearth of the mother-city and bring the light to the colony – just as we do today with Olympic fire. The meaning, however, was deeper than just a ceremony. It symbolised the spiritual bond between the colony and the mother-city.¹²⁷

Another parallel between domestic and official cult was the worship of ancestors. In the case of the *polis*, it was the worship of heroes. All cities had their body of heroes who were commemorated and, actually, as Polly Low argues, it is basically commemorating the *polis* and fostering its unity: “it is the whole – the *polis* – rather than the part – the individual (and individuated) citizen – which remains central to the memorial¹²⁸.” She states that “the broad pattern of commemorative behaviour seems to fit perfectly with what is widely perceived to be a key tenet of Athenian democratic ideology: participation in the service of the city is open to all citizens; and all citizens who serve the

¹²⁵ Mikalson 2005, 16-21; Furuhausen 1983, 172ff.

¹²⁶ De Couloges 1920, 29f.

¹²⁷ Malkin 1987, 114-134; Murray 1998, 71f.

¹²⁸ For example, In the Perikles famous funeral oratio (Thuk. 2.35-46), the general tone: “These take as your model, and judging happiness to be the fruit of freedom and freedom of valor, never decline the dangers of war (2.43.4).”

city properly will receive equal honour.” In this respect, there seems to be little differences between democratic Athénai and oligarchic Megara.¹²⁹

There was certain development in the Hellene cult. The home divinities of powerful families became protectors of the cities. Thus, according to de Coulages, Déméter of Eleusis was the god of Eumolpidies, Athéné belonged to the family of Butadis, etc. It is this enlargement from family to state god that lies behind the tradition of sacred fire in Hellene *poleis* as well as the tradition that some priestly posts were inheritable only within one family. Another parallel development was that when the gods were antropomorfised¹³⁰, the heart ceased to be the god and was descended to be the altar of the god. The protector god left the small altar in the *oikos* his/her family and got his/her own *oikos*, the temple. However, the altar moved along but was not placed into a hidden place, like in the private *oikos*, but in front of the temple in the open place. Like members of the family gathered around the home altar, citizens gathered around the altar of their patron divinity.¹³¹

SMALL TRADITION in Hellas focused on unofficial or semi-official cults¹³². In practice the difference of small tradition to official cult was that while the latter was compulsory to citizens, the former was voluntary. Another major formal difference was that cults were open to all Hellene speaking who did not have ‘blood in their hands.’ Vernant divides them into three groups: mysteries, Dionysian religion and Orphism¹³³. Mysteries consisted of both those seen as national (mysteries of Eleusis) as well as those, which were practiced especially among foreign-born metics, like Isis and Amun cults¹³⁴. One could add Pythagoreanism to the list as well.

On the other hand, Eleusinian, Dionysian and Orphic cults had much in common. They had partly same deities that were served; the two first focused on fertility and all had some aspect of rebirth imbedded in their ideology. Moreover, Pythagoreanism and even Platonism were indebted for several traits of thinking to these cults. Thus, there was more common in them than difference¹³⁵.

¹²⁹ Low 2003 (quotations 99f., 108).

¹³⁰ Furuhausen (1983, 170) argues that it was only after contacts to Egypt and Mesopotamia when Hellenes started to portrait their gods in the human form and build temples for them.

¹³¹ De Coulages 1920, 145-148, 173.

¹³² In this point, there must be made a note. First, since most of our documents are from democratic Athens, the difference between Great Tradition and Small Tradition is fuzzy in them. On the other hand, we do not have much knowledge of the religious traditions of the lower classes, like slaves and Spartéen *perioikoi* and helots. Thus, the view concerning the Small Tradition is most probably biased. We can only suppose that, like in Orient, foreign slaves served both official gods and their native gods. Moreover, it is significant that when Christianity arose, it was much a religion of the lower classes.

¹³³ Vernant 1987, 112.

¹³⁴ Egyptian cults became a part of Hellene culture during the fourth century although there has been found a figure in a grave at Eleusis from 700. Later, in Hellenistic period, also other eastern religions took foot in Hellas. Moreover, there emerged a boom to identify Hellene gods with Egyptian ones. (Kákosy 1995)

¹³⁵ In this respect, Edward A. Beach (1995) recognises two contrasting hermeneutical approaches. According to him, George E. Mylonas (1961) “denies any mythological or ritual parallelism between Orphic and Eleusinian Mysteries.”

Eleusinian Mysteries were the most important mystery cult in Hellas. They were part of the Hellene chthonic tradition that traced to the prehistoric age. Festivals in Eleusis were held annually in honour of grain goddess Démétér and her daughter Persefoné, queen of the Underworld and wife of Haidés. The cult dates at least to eight century BC¹³⁶ but most probably have its roots in Mycenaean¹³⁷, Minoan¹³⁸ and Egyptian¹³⁹ religions. Moreover, similar cults attached to grain goddesses can be found round the ancient world. At first the mysteries were local but when Eleusis became a *demos* of Athénai., Eleusinian mysteries became part of the Athénaian festival calendar. Already before the classical era, the main festival, The Greater Mysterion¹⁴⁰, had got a pan-Hellenic status. Later the mysteries became pan-Mediterranean and, for example Augustus, Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, Suetonius and Cicero were among those Romans who were initiated. The Eleusinian mysteries ended when the Roman Emperor Theodosius I closed the sanctuary in 392 AD and the last remnants of the cult were wiped out by Alaric, king of Goths, in 396 AD.¹⁴¹

The central myth, told in Homeric Hymn to Démétér, explains how Haidés abducted Kore, (maiden Persefoné) and took her to his kingdom. Démétér sought her daughter, entered to Eleusis, was well received there and established the mysteries. When she heard from Helios who was responsible for the abduction, she went on strike and did not allow the crop to grow. Finally Zeus started to negotiate and managed to establish a compromise: Persefoné stays one third of the year (winter) in the Underworld and the rest (spring-summer) with her mother. Thus, Persefoné is a Hellene variant of dying and rising god(dess) of fertility.¹⁴²

Eleusinian mysteries were not only celebration of the grain goddess but an initiation ritual as well. According to Harold R. Willoughby, they had four distinct stages: *katharis* (preliminary purification), *sustasis* (preliminary rites), *telete* (the initiation) and *epopteia* (highest grade of initiation). Only the two first were public. The nine day festival took place in the month of

Karoly Kerényi (1963, 101-55), in turn, “admits, even welcomes, the commingling of Dionysian motifs with those of Demeter [Eleusis] as complementary aspects of a single, possibly hemaphroditic deity.” He also refers to William James note in explaining these different approaches: “there are two kinds of scholarly temperaments: those that dread above all the risk of possibly mistaking falsehoods for truths, and those who fear even more the risk of missing potentially valuable truths.” Evidently, he counts Mylonas to the first group and Kerényi to the last.

¹³⁶ Evans (2002, 234 n.11.) notes that the earlier Démétér sanctuary dates to eight century.

¹³⁷ Mylonas 1961, 34.

¹³⁸ Willets 1962, 52, 149,169, 197f.; Faure 1991, 334; Graves 1981, 95f. Also *Homeric Hymn to Démétér* (2.123) mention that Démétér came from Crete. Diodorus Siculus adds that similar rites were performed in Cnossos for all who wanted to participate (Graves 1981, 96).

¹³⁹ Beach 1995.

¹⁴⁰ According to Willoughby (1929, II, 3) and *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (s.w. Eleusinia, ch 3, pp. 717f.) the ‘Lesser Mysteries’, that were celebrated six months earlier, were prerequisite for the ‘Great Mysteries’.

¹⁴¹ Willoughby 1929, II, 0,1; *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* s.w. Eleusinia, ch 1, 2, pp. 715ff.

¹⁴² *Homeric Hymn to Démétér*. A collection of parallel stories of ancient authors can be found in Beck (s.d.).

Harmonised versions of the myth can be found in Parada (s.w.:s Demeter, Eleusis, Persephone), Graves (1981, 89-

Boedromion (late September). The events started in Eleusis (some 30 km NW from Athénai) from where a military unit (*ephebes*) brought the covered *Hiera*¹⁴³ (holy things) to Athénai two days before the festival. The main festival begun in 15 Boedromion (13th September) with the assembly where the *hierophant* (the leader of the ceremonies) warned those who had not ‘clean hands’ and did not have ‘intelligible speech’ to leave. On the next day the initiates and their *mystagogus* (tutors in initiation ceremony) purified themselves in the sea in Piraeus. They carried piglets with them and later the piglet was sacrificed and its blood was sprinkled on the initiate¹⁴⁴. After the purification, few days were spent in rites in Athénai but on the fifth day (19 Boedromion) of the festival they marched with *Hiera* and a statue of boy-god Iacchos (=Dionysos) to Eleusis where the mysteries took place¹⁴⁵. Before entering the sanctuary, initiates had to fast and drink special drink called *kykeon*¹⁴⁶. The hearth of ceremonies were *deiknymena* (things shown), *legomena* (things said) and *dromena* (things done). These probably consisted of exhibition of sacred objects, participation in ritual reenactment or dancing of Déméter-Persefoné-legend (a version of passion drama)¹⁴⁷ and explanatory narration that commented the meaning of ceremonies¹⁴⁸. The ceremony led the initiate to experience the sorrow and joy of Déméter and possibly it was some sort of ‘guided tour to Haidés’ since death and rebirth were central elements in the myth and, as Cicero¹⁴⁹ witnesses, the mysteries prepared the initiated to face the life and death differently.¹⁵⁰

92), Kerényi 1963, 101-55; 1985, 230-249); Murray (1998, 62-70).

¹⁴³ Willoughby (1929, II, 3), building on Tertullianus and Hippolytus, supposes that the *Hiera* were wooden images of Déméter and Persefoné as well as a corn token. *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (s.w. Eleusinia, ch 4, pp. 719) refers to Clement of Alexandria and state that they were playthings of the child Iacchus.

¹⁴⁴ Nancy Evans (2002, 241f.) notes that pigs played important role in Eleusinian mysteries. She, however, refers to five deep (one is over 20m) pits within the Eleusis sanctuary which consisted of compost with animal bones. This would hint that the piglets were sacrificed to chthonic god and thrown to the pit.

¹⁴⁵ Soph.Ant 1115-1125; Paus 1.2.4. Diodorus Siculus (Diod 5.75) cites the Orphic tradition where Dionysos (Zagreus, ‘great hunter’) was the son of Persefoné and Zeus. However, sometimes Haidés was also called as Zeus Kthonios which means literally ‘god of the underworld’ (Kerenyi 1985, 47, 230, 250). Thus, the supposed sacred marriage (see below) in Eleusinian mysteries would recite Haidés’ rape of Persefoné, as the myth tells.

¹⁴⁶ Clement of Alexandria: Exhortation to the Greeks 2.18. R. Gordon Wasson, Albert Hofmann and Carl A.P. Ruck (1978) have supposed that *kykeon* would have been some sort of psychedelic drug. However, Ivan Valencic (1994) has shown that the proposed explanations are not valid.

¹⁴⁷ An alternative explanation (that is highly questioned) is that ‘things done’ would mean similar sacred marriage as in Sumer and in Dionysian cult in Athénai where the *basilissa* was ritually married with Dionysos. In that case, the drama would be the ‘things shown’- part of the mysteries. This would fit to Willoughby’s (1929 II, 3) thesis that exhibition of the *Hiera* was one only in the precense of the *epopteia* (highest level initiates) and not shown to the *neophytes* (new initiates). On the other hand, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (s.w. Eleusinia, ch 8, pp. 723f.) proposes that the Zeus-Persefoné myth was acted to second year initiates.

¹⁴⁸ Willoughby (1929 II, 3) refers to fragment preserved under *Sopatros*, which “recounts the dream of young man who saw the spectacle of the mysteries. Because he did not hear the words of the hierophant, however, he could not consider himself initiated.”

¹⁴⁹ Cic.Laws 2.14.36.

¹⁵⁰ Willoughby 1929 II, 3; *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* s.w. Eleusinia, ch 4, 8, pp.718ff, 723f.; Morford & Lenardon 1985, 244ff.; Beach 1995;

The significance of this cult was manifold. First, it must be remembered the religious context of the time. Harold Willoughby writes on the Augustan era as follows:

For the masses of men former religious sanctions and guaranties no longer functioned... But the masses of men did not become, irreligious by any means. Instead, they turned to religions of another type and sought satisfactions of a different variety. Their quest was no longer for a god powerful enough to save the state but rather for one who was benevolent enough to save the individual... In particular, men turned for the satisfaction of personal desires to the mystery group of religions, which were indeed very ancient cults but had hitherto been comparatively insignificant... Chief among the personal satisfactions these cults had to offer was the privilege of a new birth for the individual. When the neophyte was initiated into the cult he became a new man--this was the gentile conviction... Among the basic religious needs met by mystery initiation, therefore, this should be mentioned as the first. It answered to the current demand for individualistic as opposed to racial guaranties in religion.¹⁵¹

Another significance was the democratic character of the mysteries. They did not limit initiates to citizens but accepted all, including women and slaves¹⁵². Third significance of the mysteries lies in its influence. In Pythagoreanism, Orphism and even Platonism there can be seen traces of the influence of mysteries. Especially the ideas of death, afterlife, punishment and rebirth in these philosophies are most probable based on Elysian world view¹⁵³. Quite revealing is Cicero's testimony:

For among the many excellent and indeed divine institutions which your Athens has brought forth and contributed to human life, none, in my opinion, is better than those mysteries. For by their means we have been brought out of our barbarous and savage mode of life and educated and refined to a state of civilization; and as the rites are called "initiations," so in very truth we have learned from them the beginnings of life, and have gained the power not only to live happily, but also to die with a better hope.¹⁵⁴

Another popular vegetation-cult in Hellas was Dionysos-cult. If Déméter was the goddess of grain, Dionysos was the god of another important fruit of the earth, the vine. Like Eleusinian mysteries, Dionysos-cult had several, partly overlapping, layers. Dionysos was originally a god of vegetation, especially that of vine¹⁵⁵. Along this aspect, there was a mystery cult of female initiates attached to him¹⁵⁶ and, finally, he had a significant part both in the folk¹⁵⁷ and civil religion¹⁵⁸ of Athénai. The origin of Dionysian cult is unknown. According to Herodotos, Dionysian cult originated in Egypt where he was served as Osiris and it came to Hellas via Phoinicia¹⁵⁹. On the other hand, the

¹⁵¹ Willoughby 1929 X, 1.

¹⁵² This aspect would back the Egyptian origin of the cult. Hellene official rituals were restricted to citizen males.

¹⁵³ Griffiths 1982.

¹⁵⁴ Cicero Laws II, xiv, 36

¹⁵⁵ Morford, Lenardon & Sham s.d. Ch.13/Summary.

¹⁵⁶ Dillon 2002, 140-153; Blundell 1995, 165-169.

¹⁵⁷ Dionysos was particularly the god of the marginalised: women, slaves and rural population.

¹⁵⁸ Vernant (1987, 112f.) argues that Dionysos-cult "expressed city's official recognition of a religion that in many ways eluded the city, contradicting it and going beyond its control." Dionysos represented the Other and questioned the established order. He was a god of *mania*, divine madness, and his power had to be recognised.

¹⁵⁹ Herodotos (Hdt. II:42, 47, 123, 144, 156). He (Hdt. II:49) tells that "I believe that Melampus learned the worship of Dionysus chiefly from Cadmus of Tyre and those who came with Cadmus from Phoenicia to the land now called Boeotia." Euripides (Eur.Ba 73-82) also links the cult to Phoenicia by saying "Blessed is he who... revering the

name is of Phrygian origin¹⁶⁰. Other places mentioned in research have been Thracia and Lydia¹⁶¹. Moreover, even Mesopotamia is not impossible¹⁶² since Euripides starts his *Bacchae* as follows:

I [Dionysos], the son of Zeus, have come to this land of the Thebans... I have left the wealthy lands of the Lydians and Phrygians, the sun-parched plains of the Persians, and the Bactrian walls, and have passed over the wintry land of the Medes, and blessed Arabia, and all of Asia which lies along the coast of the salt sea with its beautifully-towered cities full of Hellenes and barbarians mingled together; and I have come to this Hellene city [Thebes] first, having already set those other lands to dance and established my mysteries there, so that I might be a deity manifest among men.¹⁶³

The cult was known in Crète¹⁶⁴ already before Bronze Age¹⁶⁵ but, as Euripides states, his mysteries were first celebrated in Thebés¹⁶⁶. Another early cultic place was Naxos¹⁶⁷. Dionysan festivals¹⁶⁸ were introduced to Athénai only during Peisistratos' tyranny¹⁶⁹. The Dionysian calendar consisted of several festivals. In December, there was a rustic festival around Athénai countryside. In January, a Lenaea festival was held in Athénai in the same time as Christians have the Epiphany. In February, there was the festival of Anthesteria which marked the end of the rationing in the beginning of sailing period. It was also the festival of fertility. The Great Dionysia at 10-15 March, was, however, most important and largest of these festivals.¹⁷⁰

Vernant argues that "the Dionysiac religion should make its appeal principally to those who do not altogether fit into the institutional organisation of the *polis*." First of all, the cult was a cult of women and slaves but also rural *demes*. In the Dionysian festivals roles were reversed and all inhibitions freed¹⁷¹. As a festival of spring, the Great Dionysia became a festival of delirium and

mysteries of great mother Kybele... serves Dionysus." On similarities of Dionysos legends with Attis, Adonis and Osiris myths, see Casadio 2003.

¹⁶⁰ Room 1997, 116.

¹⁶¹ Eur.Ba 55f., 64f.; Rogers 1979, 250.

¹⁶² The element of sacred marriage between the basilissa and Dionysos would refer either to Egypt or Mesopotamia.

¹⁶³ Eur.Ba 1, 11-22.

¹⁶⁴ According to Peck (1898 s.v. Dionysia) the autumn festival of Dionysos, "the Oskophoria, supposed to have been instituted by Theseus on his return from Crete." Theseus was the Troizénian (town in later district of Argolis) hero (or, according to another version, prince of Athénai) who slaughtered the Minotaur.

¹⁶⁵ Adrian Room (2003, 116) notes that his name occurs already in Linear B tablets in Knossos.

¹⁶⁶ "And all the female offspring of Thebes, as many as are women, I have driven maddened from the house, and they, mingled with the daughters of Kadmos, sit on roofless rocks beneath green pines. For this city must learn, even if it is unwilling, [40] that it is not initiated into my Bacchic rites, and that I plead the case of my mother, Semele, in appearing manifest to mortals as a divinity whom she bore to Zeus." (Eur.Ba 35-42)

¹⁶⁷ In Naxos, Dionysios frightened Theseus away from Adriane in order to charm her.

¹⁶⁸ Adrian Room (2003, 116) argues that the name Dionysios is of Phrygian origin and is possibly combined of *dio-* (of the gods) and ether from *neos* (new) or *nyos* (daughter-in-law) which would mean that his name means 'a divine son.'

¹⁶⁹ The introduction of Dionysos into Athénai occurred along with the joining of Eleutherai village into Athénai. The union was sealed by moving the patron deity of the village to Athénai and erecting him a chapel. (Furuhagen 1983, 154; Freeman 1996, 131)

¹⁷⁰ Harris 2004, 166; Murray 1998, 119; Furuhagen 1983, 154.

¹⁷¹ Freeman (1996, 196) notes that "it seems that if rebellion was sanctioned within defined limits and times it made it all the more controllable for the rest of the year."

maddness which aimed in ecstatic group experience. Often this meant heavy drinking and loosening of sexual modesty. Vernant argues that the experience “was not social, but, rather, spiritual, in which each individual would participate of his free will, through free association, and regardless of his civic status.”¹⁷²

Festivals of Dionysos consisted of drinking¹⁷³, carrying huge wooden or pottery phallus from one sanctuary to another, ecstatic dancing and performances. It was during these Dionysian festivals where Hellene theatre has its roots¹⁷⁴. First performances were organised near the temple of Dionysos on the south slope of Acropolis. After the processions and offerings, young men brought Dionysos statue to the theatre to see the presentations¹⁷⁵, which lasted five days. In tragedies, the chorus presented everyman's values while actors defended their heroic values. In comedies, the role of the chorus was closer to the original Dionysian idea: the chorus acted in rowdy imaginative roles acting frogs, birds or bees.¹⁷⁶

However, Dionysos-cult was not primarily public fun. For its devotees, the drinking and dancing was a way to have mystical union with their god. In their thinking, Dionysos was not only the god of wine. As Willoughby states: “The god was in the wine; he was the wine.” Also the eating of raw flesh was a sacrament to Dionysians. Dionysos was not only god of vine but god of animal life as well. In this role he was identified with the main domestic animal in each region (to goat in Thrace, to bull in Crète and Attica). Like drinking their god, they got to mystical union by eating him as well. According to Willoughby, “the real meaning of the orgy was that it enabled the devotee to partake of a divine substance and so to enter into direct and realistic communion with his god.”¹⁷⁷

Dionysian cult also consisted of its mysteries. These mysteries included the annual marriage of the wife of the *archon-basileos* to Dionysos during the Anthesteria. Assisting her, there were the *gerarai*, group of fourteen initiated women who performed sacred rites in Dionysos' temple. Another rite was the meeting of Athénaian Thyiads, Bacchantes or Maenads, women who participated orgiastic rites. They met their Delphian counterparts every third year. Robert Graves traces the Maenads to the pre-Apollonian chthonic Gaia religion of Delphoi and Maenads were

¹⁷² Vernant 1983, 324ff. See also Freeman 1996, 218f.

¹⁷³ The first day of Anthesteria “was called ‘cask-opening day’, and the second ‘pouring day’ (Murray 1998, 119).”

¹⁷⁴ According to Harris (2004, 166) at first it consisted of singing and dancing chorus. Thespis added an actor who had a dialogue with the chorus in 534 BC and Aischylos brought another actor in the break of the fifth century. Some decades later a third actor was added and the number of actors remained in those three.

¹⁷⁵ The main responsibility on the whole festival was on one of archons, who chose the writers, whose plays were presented. The presentations were founded by some rich *koregi*, a producer, who wanted to clean his public image. (Harris 2004, 168).

¹⁷⁶ Harris 2004, 166f.

¹⁷⁷ Willoughby 1929, III, 1, 2.

originally Gaia's priestesses¹⁷⁸. He also argues that the mysteries contained eating of hallucinogenic mushrooms, which would lead to loosening of inhibitions.¹⁷⁹

The third important cult was Orphism. Willoughby states that "Orphism represented a reformed Dionysianism¹⁸⁰." The movement emerged during the sixth century BC and lasted to the sixth century AD. It influenced both its preceding mystery cults as well as to Hellenic philosophy. Some ideas of afterlife and reincarnation in Platon's texts are from Orphism.

Like Eleusinian mysteries, Orphic central mythology focused on visiting Haidés. Ovidius, in his *Metamorphoses*, tells how the Thracian bard Orpheus lost his newly wed wife Eurudiké by snake-bite. Orpheus followed her to the Underworld and moved the hearths of Haidés and Persefoné so that he was given permission to bring her wife back. The only condition being that he does not look his fiancé until back on earth. However, as could be supposed, Orpheus failed and lost Eurudiké. Orpheus became a woman-hater, was the first homosexual in Thrachia and was finally torn into pieces by Bacchic women. While his limbs were scattered, his head and lyre floated to sea and washed ashore at Lesbos.¹⁸¹

Like in Eleusinian mysteries, initiation was central part of the cult. However, when Eleusis was for its adherents only some sort of Oasis where they went to load their batteries, Orphism required total commitment. Orphicoi, after the Dionysian style eating of raw meat sacrament in initiation, were vegetarian ascetics whose life centred on purity issues. Along with initiation and ascetic life, Orphicoi produced significant body of literature¹⁸², which contained cosmological, liturgical and theurgical works. Actually, it was the first religion of the book in Hellas. A special genre in this literature was the body of golden tablets that were placed in tombs of the deceased. They were sort of Greco-Roman version of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and guided the deceased through the afterworld. Especially they gave instructions how not to drink from the river Lethe (Forgetfulness) and seek the Well of Memory. Orphicoi believed in original sin and migration of souls. According to their theology, a soul must live three pure lives before it can ascend to tower of Cronos in the Isles of the Blessed.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁸ According to Graves (1981, 9) satyrs were goat-totem tribesmen and centaurs horse-totem tribesmen in this pre-Myceanaean culture.

¹⁷⁹ Vernant 1987, 113; Furuahagen 1983, 154; Graves 1981, 9f., 17f.

¹⁸⁰ Willoughby 1929, IV, 0.

¹⁸¹ Ov.Met 10.1-85, 11.1-84.

¹⁸² Most of these works are preserved only in fragments in other works. According to Willoughby (1929, IV, 1) Platon, along with Aristophanes, Euripides, and, especially, Pindar "include the bulk of classical testimonia to the Orphic mysteries." Along fragments these works, we have some Orphic tablets found in tombs. However, perhaps the most important Orphic document is the *Derveni Papyrus* from late fifth century BC (Betegh 2004).

¹⁸³ *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* 1890, s.w. Orphica; Willoughby 1929, IV.

Like all religious movements, Orphism faced its changes as well. Starting as a Dionysian reformation movement, it resonated with both Pythagoreanism¹⁸⁴ and Eleusinian tradition¹⁸⁵. Moreover, there was strong connection with Orphism and Platonism. These contacts shaped each of these movements so that early Orphism and late Orphism do not necessarily have same emphases. Although there was a strong emphasis on women in Eleusinian and Dionysian mysteries, the festivals attached to them were not the only festivals of women. Along them, there were such women only festivals like Stenia, which was held two days before Thesmophoria (in the month Pyanopsion - September-October), the festival in honour of Déméter Thesmophoros. Its main purpose was to ensure agricultural fertility (Pyanopsion was the sowing month in Attica) and it included pig sacrifice and secret rituals. Other festivals were Haloa, Skira, Tauropholia, and Corinthian *frauenfest*.¹⁸⁶

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¹⁸⁴ Pythagoras was known in ancient world more as a mystic than a mathematician. He studied in Phoenicia and, possibly, in Egypt. In any case, he was familiar with Egyptian religion – both official and folk traditions. (Kákosy 1995, 6.) *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (1890, 298 – s.w. Orphica) argues that Pythagoreanism “was an ascetic religious society, very similar in some points to the Orphics; and accordingly the scattered Pythagoreans [when the brotherhood broke up] joined naturally to Orphics, and introduced into their doctrines the more highly developed speculative principles which their master had taught them.”

¹⁸⁵ *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (1890, 717 – s.w. Eleusinia), referring to François Lenormant’s findings, argue that “ Orphism, though introduced in a measure at this time, did not get any permanent hold on the Eleusinian worship till 380 B.C., when the family of the Lycomidae, who were specially devoted to Orphic rites, obtained the office of daduchus..., his reason being that there is no allusion to Zagreus in Aristophanes or the other Attic writers, while he appears quite established by the time of Callimachus.”

¹⁸⁶ Dillon 2003, 109-130.

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