GAIA

MOTHER GODDESS EARTH IN ANCIENT GREECE

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Fig. 1. The Island of Ithaka, Greece – the home of Odysseus.

The Homeric ‘Hymn to Gaia’ - written down in the 5th century BC

Gaia, mother of all,
the oldest one, the foundation,
I shall sing to Earth.

She feeds everyone in the world.

Whoever you are,
whether you walk upon her sacred ground
or move through the paths of the sea,
you who fly,

She is the one who nourishes you
from her treasure-store.

Queen of Earth, through you
beautiful children, beautiful harvests, come.
You give life and you take life away.

Blessed are those you honour with a willing heart.
They who have this, have everything.

Their fields thicken with bright corn,
the cattle grow heavy in the pastures,
their house brims over with good things.

The men are masters of their city,
the laws are just, the women are fair,
happiness and fortune richly follow them.

Their sons delight in the ecstasy of youth.
Their daughters play, skipping in and out,
they dance in the grass over soft flowers.

It was you who honoured them,
generous goddess, sacred spirit.

Farewell, mother of the gods,
bride of starry Heaven.

For my song, allow me a life
my heart loves.

And now and in another song
I will remember you. [1]

In the west we know Gaia as the Mother Goddess of Ancient Greece, yet her origins lie in Ancient India. She was brought from India to Europe by the Mycenaean tribes when they arrived in Crete around 2000 BC, and later came to Greece.

'Gaya' first appears, in Sanscrit, in the Old Indian *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, where the 'Gayatri Mantra' was named as the first to come forth from the *Om*, the original sound. 'Gayatri' has a meaning which expands infinitely to include Earth, humanity and all other beings, and was also a Story of Origin relating human beings to Earth as the image or 'Moving Song' of the whole [2]

So the Greek Gaia, in sound, image and name, has a long lineage, bringing with her echoes of the Origin of the World.

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When the Mycenaeans reached Crete they found themselves entering a long established tradition of the culture of the Goddess, beginning with the art of the people of Bronze Age Minoan Crete: [3]

... as this Bronze Age Minoan Goddess, found in Knossos in Crete, from around 1,600 BC.

Snakes curl round her head-dress, unite across her womb, and wind down her arms, bestowing life.

Fig. 2. Goddess wreathed in snakes. Found buried in a grain bin or coffin in the palace at Knossos. The figure was made in faience - a crushed quartz-paste material which, after firing, gives a true vitreous finish with bright colors and a lustrous sheen. 1,600 BC. Heraklion Museum, Crete.

... and still further back through the Neolithic cultures of Old Europe - 4000 to 10,000 BC – as this seated goddess, also found in Crete:

Fig. 3. Neolithic goddess, painted with snakes. Terracotta. Found in Pano Chorio, western Crete. c. 5800-4800 BC

... and even earlier, the Palaeolithic goddesses - as this Goddess of Lespugue in France, carved out of mammoth ivory, c. 25,000 BC.

Fig. 4. The Goddess of Lespugue. Mammoth ivory. c. 25,000 BC, Musee de L'Homme, France.

And the Goddess of Hohle Fels, also carved out of mammoth ivory, found in a cave in Bavaria, from around 40,000 BC, the oldest of all.

Fig. 5. 'Goddess of Hohle Fels.' Mammoth ivory figurine, found in a cave near Schelklingen, Germany. Prehistoric Museum of Blaubeuren. Upper Paleolithic, c. 40,000 BC.

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Fig. 6. Mount Olympos, the highest mountain in Greece, on the border between Thessaly and Macedonia, between Larissa and Pieria, about 80 km south west from Thessaloniki.

The Mycenaeans were just one of the many waves of Indo-European tribes who came from the northern shores of the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. They became known primarily as Achaeans,

after the Achaea region of Greece, the most northern part of the Pelopponese, and this is what Homer calls them when he speaks of them, elegiacally, in the Odyssey and the Iliad, written down around 700 BC, telling tales of a time several hundred years before. 4 Their chief divinity was the god Zeus.

In Greece, there were already three different Stories of Origin, reflecting the different groups of people who had come before them: the Pelasgian, the Orphic, and the Homeric. All these creation myths begin with a Mother Goddess arising out of Chaos, Darkness, or Sea, who then unites with a Serpent or the Wind, and from their union the world comes into being.

In Orphic myth, the Goddess of black-winged Night unites with the Wind and lays a silver egg in the womb of Darkness. Phanes, god of light, Protogonos, the first-born, is here emerging from the World-Egg entwined by a serpent. A Zodiac encircles the World-Egg. A Roman bas-relief from the 1st century AD.

Fig. 7. Phanes hatching from the world-egg. Roman bas-relief, with zodiac. 1st c. AD. Museum in Moderna.

In the 'Olympian' creation myth of the Mycenaeans – named after Mount Olympos, the home of the gods and the closest place to heaven - *Chaos* is first, and then comes *Gaia*, who gives birth to all the forms that are to come.

The fusion of the two cultural traditions – the native European and the immigrant Indo-European - allowed an entirely new narrative voice to appear – one where the timeless images of the ancient goddess cultures could be explored through the narrative of story, inspired by characters belonging to a particular time and place. [5] Hesiod, writing around 700 BC, is the earliest poet to imagine the *unfolding* stages of creation in his poem '*Theogony: the Genealogy of the Gods*.' After an invocation to the Muses, he begins:

> Chaos was first of all,
> but next appeared broad-breasted Gaia,
> sure standing place for all the gods
> who live on snowy Olympus' peak. [6]

Gaia, as the ‘first to arise from chaos,’ is then the one who presents a ‘cosmos’ – meaning in Greek an ‘ordering,’ a ‘harmonious whole.’ She embodies, perhaps, the original moment of wonder which made sense of the world, and so was the foundation on which the gods could stand and the mind could rest.

Fig. 8. Gaia. Stone Statue. Palaikastro, Crete. 3rd century BC.

There are not many images of Gaia in Greece, perhaps because, being herself the origin, she could be found in everything. Here, the flat and heavy stillness of her face evokes one of the Indo-European names for Goddess Earth, *Plataea*, the ‘Broad One.’ Even with the slow curls of her hair, her face has an androgynous feeling about it, drawing us back through Bronze Age Crete into Neolithic and Palaeolithic images of the Great Mother Goddess who, often with phallic neck and rounded womb, contained both male and female characteristics within herself.

As though the emergence of Gaia releases the structural principles of the universe, Tartarus – the Underworld - then appears, followed by Eros – Love – ‘most beautiful of all the deathless gods,’ the Web of Relationships which binds the world together.

Fig. 9. Eros playing the Flute. Attic Red Figure, Lekythos. c. 470-460 BC. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

From Chaos, meaning in Greek ‘abyss’ - the primeval void of the Universe - comes *Nyx*, Night, and *Erebos*, Darkness, who unite to bring forth Day and Space. As though independent of these more abstract structuring principles, Gaia then gives birth out of herself to *Ouranos*, Sky, Heaven, and Mountains, *Orea*, and Sea, *Pontos*:

> And Gaia bore starry Heaven, first,
> to be an equal to herself, to cover her
> all over, and to be a resting-place,
> always secure, for all the blessed gods.
> Then she brought forth long hills,
> the lovely homes of goddesses,
> those nymphs who live among the mountain clefts.

Then without pleasant love she brought forth
the barren sea with swollen waves, Pontus.
And then she lay with Heaven ... [7]

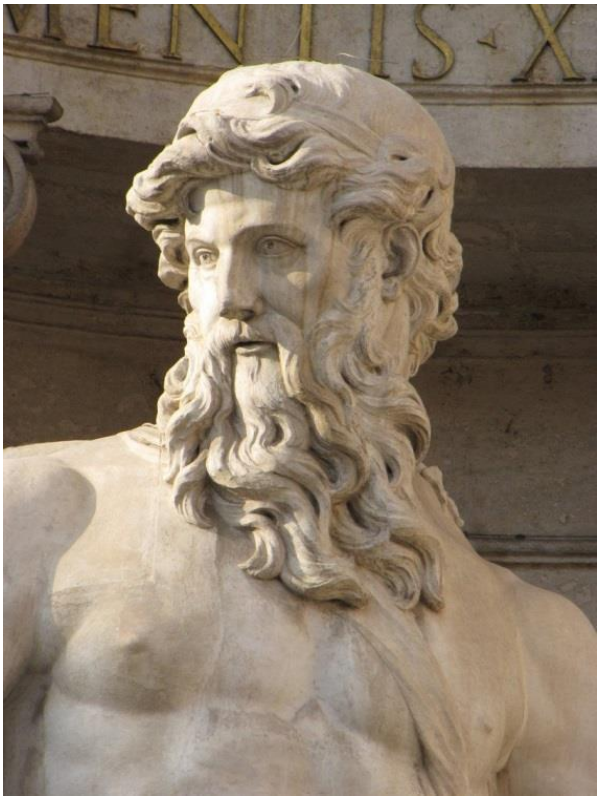

Fig. 10. Uranus (*Ouranos*, Sky). The Trevi Fountain. Late Baroque! Designed by Nicola Salvi and completed by Giuseppi Pannini in 1762.

Transforming her son, *Ouranos*, into her lover, in the widespread tradition of son-lovers of the Goddess, Gaia gives birth to the next generation of divinities called the Titans: six goddesses and six gods, among whom were *Rhea*, 'the Flowing One,' here riding on her lion, embodying the vitality of the life force - expressed in the pre-Socratic poet Heraclitus's aphorism as '*panta rhei'* – 'everything flows.' [8]

Fig. 11. Rhea riding on a lion. Athenian red-figure vase fragment. c. 5th century BC. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Also, Themis, goddess of the natural order, prophet of divine law and tradition and the voice of the oracles of Delphi and Dodona - disclosing Gaia, Earth, as inherently ordered and lawful. Later with Zeus she became the mother of the Fates and of the Seasons, and had a seat by his side on Olympus as his advisor.

Fig. 12. Themis, seated on the Delphic tripod as the Pithia, the Oracle of Delphi, taking over from her mother Gaia. Athenian red-figure kylix, a drinking vase. c. 5th century BC. Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Berlin.

Also, *Mnemosune*, whose name means Memory, Mother of the Muses, disclosing Gaia as carrying the memory of the whole - what we might now call the Great Memory. [9]

Fig. 13. *Mnemosune* (Mnemosyne) standing, holding the scroll of memory, with her daughter Kalliope playing the lyre. Lekythos, 5th century BC. Museo Archeologico Nazional di Siracusa.

Then *Hyperion* and *Theia*, god and goddess of Light, who gave birth to *Helios*, Sun, *Selene*, Moon, and *Eos*, 'the early-born and rosy-fingered Dawn.'

Fig. 14. Helios, the Sun God, in his chariot of horses, the star figures leaping out of the way. Red-figure vase painting. c. 440 BC. British Museum.

Fig. 15. Selene, Goddess of the Moon, riding across the sky, as though reining in her horses at the Full Moon, which she wears upon her head. Red-figure cup by the Brygos Painter, Vulci. 490 BC. Staatliche Museum zu Berlin, Berlin.

Among other Titans, were Iapetus and the Oceanid Asia, or Clymene, who gave birth to Promethius, who stole fire from the gods for humans, Epimethius, and Atlas, here seated, with Gaia standing beside him. The vertical patterning, running down the centre of her gown, recalls the rivulets of the Waters of Life.

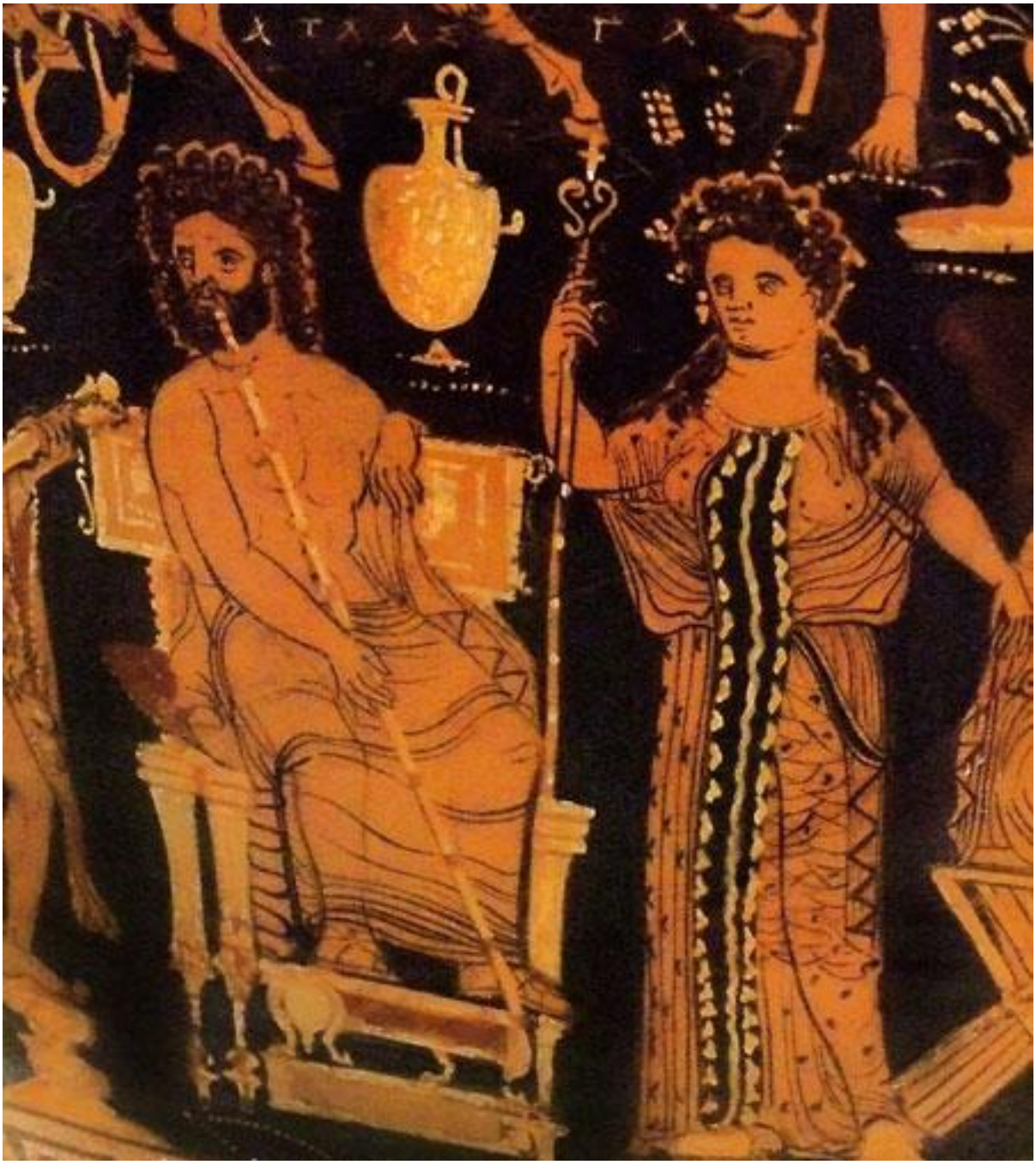

Fig. 16. Atlas, seated, with Gaia standing beside him. Apulian red-figure volute krater. c 4th century BC. Dallas Museum of Art.

Fig. 17. Chronos. Roman statue. 1st century AD. Vatican, Royal Cast Collection, Copenhagen.

And finally Chronos (Kronos), the last of the Titans, whose name means 'Time.' He reveals an Earth structured by the changing rhythms of the Moon, the Sun and the Seasons - bringing the virtues of the other goddesses and gods into the condition of life in Time – both creation and destruction.

It followed that the flow of life, lawfulness, memory, and temporal rhythm, belonged also to all creation. In contemporary terms, Gaia was a vision of the universe as one dynamic living whole.

As we follow the story of Gaia unfolding into creation it is remarkable how, in the Imagination of the ancient Greeks, Gaia was a dynamic force at each stage of creation - conceived as 'regulating' the on-going process whenever it is arrested. Inevitably, the stages of the Earth's procreation, as imagined by humans on the human model - Gaia giving birth to children who give

birth to their children, and so on - are also, or rather primarily, stages of the differentiation of human consciousness trying itself to understand how a world comes into being, and also what prevents or inhibits its growing - its impulse to thrive. Yet it is a consciousness closer to the archetypal source than our own, at least two and half thousand years ago, and in that sense we may be listening to an encoded wisdom we have lost touch with.

In the next stage of this story, suddenly there is a hiatus and creation stops. Significantly, it is when Gaia and Ouranos bring forth violence and ugliness - when force, not beauty, comes into being. Three huge, violent and ugly giants are born, with fifty heads and a hundred arms. This echoes the human question: what to do when 'things go wrong' and threaten the integrity of our purpose as we see it? The all too familiar answer of Ouranos is to deny it, and carry on as before.

Ouranos hates the giants as soon as they are born and pushes them back inside Gaia's womb so they would not see the light. But this stretches and strains Gaia and she groans mightily. So she thinks of a plan. She brings forth from her body grey iron and forms a sickle with great teeth, and asks her children for help. Chronos, Time, takes up the challenge:

> Great Ouranos came, and with him brought the night.
> Longing for love, he lay around Gaia,
> Spreading out fully. But the hidden boy
> Stretched forth his left hand; in his right hand he took
> The great long jagged sickle; eagerly
> He harvested his father's genitals
> And threw them off behind. They did not fall
> From his hands in vain, for all the bloody drops
> That leaped out were received by Gaia. [10]

From the drops of blood Gaia brings forth the Giants and the *Erinyes*, the three Furies – goddesses who become guardians of ethical law, and later pursued Orestes for the murder of his Mother - also euphemistically called the *Eumenides*, the Kindly Ones.

Fig. 18. Two Erinyes in the Underworld. wearing hunting clothes, with vipers winding round their arms and through their hair. Apulian Red-figure Krater. c. 340 BC. Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe.

This aspect of the story is known from many other creation myths as the 'Separation of the World Parents,' and inaugurates the next stage of creation now that the structure of the universe is in place.

Here it is significant that it is Chronos who acts on behalf of Gaia and sets the drama of life going again.[11.] Time now becomes that 'moving image of eternity,' as Plato puts it in the *Timaeus*.[12] The severed genitals of Ouranos, falling into the lap of the Sea, come back into life as Aphrodite, born from the foam (*aphros*). She is then the first fruit of the separation of Heaven and Earth, the only divinity to carry within herself the memory of the whole - becoming the goddess of Love. [13]

Fig. 19. Aphrodite's birth from the waves was re-enacted every year in spring as a ceremony of rebirth. Marble bas relief known as the Ludovisi Throne. Museo Nazionale Romano di Palazzo Attemps, Rome. c. 470-460 BC.

But when Chronos rules instead of his father he also prevents life from growing – time *without* eternal renewal. (In Ancient Egypt, by contrast, Thoth, the lunar god of eternity and time, himself added a missing piece each 'month' to the re-membering of the fragmented Moon).[14] Chronos united with his sister Rhea, the Flowing One, and she brought forth three daughters – Hestia, the first-born, goddess of the Hearth, Demeter, goddess of the Harvest, and Hera, goddess of Marriage and Family - and then three sons – Poseidon, god of the Sea, Hades, god of the Underworld, and lastly Zeus, god of the Sky, Thunder and Lightning, the one destined to become ruler of the gods on Olympos.

Fig. 20. Poseidon, god of the Sea, also known as the Earth-Shaker and creator of the Horse. Corinthian plaque. 550-525 BC. The Louvre, Paris.

So while, generally, the gods form the structural principles of Sky, Sea, and Underworld, the goddesses explore the relation of humans to the given conditions of life, the habitation of Earth in the human realm.

But Gaia, prescient of all things, had warned Chronos that he too would be supplanted in his turn, so Chronos swallows his children as soon as they are born - 'Devouring Time,' as Shakespeare has it. [15] Except for Zeus, the last born.

Fig. 21. Rhea giving Chronos a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes. Pelike by the Nausikaa painter. 460 BC. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Again it is Gaia who keeps the dynamic movement of life going. She gives Rhea, his mother, a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes to trick Chronos into thinking he was swallowing his last child, and hides the baby Zeus in the Diktaion Cave in Crete (where you can still see tiny sculptures of bulls, one of his animal forms, buried in the walls). This recalls the ancient affinity between earlier Mycenaean and Minoan rituals of the rebirth of the year god of the spring.

Fig. 22. Zeus with thunderbolt and eagle. Etruscan red figure vase. The Louvre, Paris.

When Zeus grows up, Gaia helps him to induce Chronos to disgorge his brothers and sisters – presumably still in the state of 'having been swallowed.' Chronos fights back, and during a ten year battle, Gaia draws the thunderbolt and lightning out of her depths to allow Zeus to vanquish Chronos, and so to reign himself as King of the Gods - the role for which, of course, he was destined, long before the patriarchal Mycenaeans reached Greece!

Zeus is the only deity in the Olympic pantheon whose name has a completely transparent Indo-European etymology which, in its original verbal form, had the meaning of 'It lightens,' 'It shines!'- a verb, something happening now - just as ancient Greeks would clap their hands and cry *Theos* (god) – 'it shines,' 'it lightens' – when they were filled with enthusiasm - *en theos* - when the god was 'in' them - as, for instance, in the revelations of the Tragedies. This was a disclosure of the

numinous, the god waking up, winking and nodding, the coming alive of divine presence. Originally, this was simply the moment becoming divine, transforming life. So, like so many nouns, Zeus began life as a verb, and lost some of the immanence of divine presence when he later became 'god *of* sky, thunder and lightning.' [16]

Yet, in one of the oldest temples to Zeus in Dodona in the north of Greece, it was said that his voice could still be heard when the leaves of the sacred oak trees whispered to the wind. And for over a thousand years his priests interpreted the rustling of the leaves and gave oracular prophecies to the people who came carrying lead sheets on which they had scratched their questions for the god.

Fig. 23. Temple of Dodona, 22 km south west of Ioannina, Epiros, Northern Greece. The theatre was constructed in Hellenistic times (4^{th} century BC – 41 BC).

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But when, after the battle was won, Zeus imprisons Chronos and the other Titans in Tartarus, the Underworld, Gaia objects, and this throws their different values into relief. Gaia, as Mother of All, accepting the ugly and the hostile, excludes nothing from the totality of creation. A battle then ensues between Gaia and Zeus and the other gods, which Zeus wins.

Fig. 24. Zeus slaying Typhon, a serpent with a hundred heads (son of Gaia and Tartarus). Red-vase painting. c. 550. BC. Staatliche Antikensammlungen, München .

Fig. 25. Poseidon fighting the giant Polybotes with his trident in a scene from the Gigantomachia, the War of the Giants. Gaia rises from the ground to plead for the life of her son. Attic red-figure vase. Aristophanes Painter. c. 410-400 BC. Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Berlin.

At this point, then, the relationship is altered between them, and it is the new image of the divine, embodied in Zeus, which separates out from the source, and inaugurates a new set of values,

distinguishing more radically between the different forms of creation: Light is often seen as antagonistic to darkness, the upper world is set *against* the lower world of Tartarus, and the new rule of oppositions is born. Many of the Titans, who fought against the Olympians, were punished by Zeus and imprisoned in Tartarus, the Underworld. Atlas was condemned to hold up the sky on his shoulders at the western edge of the world, and came to embody the celestial axis around which the heavens revolve.

Unsurprisingly, then, there is now a re-evaluation of the matriarchal order, and a new 'rule of law' is inaugurated.

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When, in contrast, the patriarchal Babylonians invaded the goddess culture of the Sumerians in 2000 BC. the lunar and earth goddess Tiamat was violently slain in two by Marduk, the wind and sun god, and one half of her dead body was remade as earth and the other lifted up as sky. [17]

Yet in Greece, the old order was brought into sympathetic relation with the new order. So the original inheritance was never lost - mainly, perhaps, because many of the original goddesses retained their spheres of influence and action. This fruitful transformation was achieved by a series of unions between Zeus and the earlier goddesses - either the Titan daughters of Gaia and Ouranos, or the native Pelasgian goddesses – and creation continued anew.

In many subtle ways, the drama of Greece shows that it is possible for a god culture and a goddess culture to come together and create a new kind of relationship, one which can recognize the virtues in each other. This way the sacredness of Earth is still honoured, with both cultures retaining some essential aspects of their own unique point of view.

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In the next stage of this story, Zeus unites with two sisters of his mother Rhea, both daughters of Ouranos and Gaia, *Themis* and *Mnemosune*: Themis, whose name means Law, brings forth the *Horai*, the Seasons, and the *Moirai*, the three spinning Fates - *Clotho, Lachesis,* and *Atropos* - who spin, weave, and cut the thread of life.

Fig. 26. Themis on the tripod of Delphi. The childless King Aegeus is receiving a prophecy of the birth of his son. Later the oracular art of prophecy was taken over by Apollo. Athenian red-figure kylix, a drinking vase. c. 5th c BC. Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Berlin.

This is the new Mycenaean story, but older lineages often break through in alternative tales. The poet Pindar, for instance, says that the Moirai were 'already there': 'Following the gleaming pathway from the springs of the encircling world-ocean to the sacred stair of Olympos in their golden chariot,' they themselves brought Themis to Zeus to be his bride – even before they were 'born.' [18] And Hesiod says that the Moirai were daughters of *Nyx*, Black Night, belonging to the Beginning.[19]

Zeus also unites with Mnemosune, goddess of Memory, who gives birth to the nine Muses.

Fig. 27. Mnemosune, standing, and Kalliope, her daughter – 'She of the Beautiful Voice' - who became goddess of epic song and the mother of Orpheus. Mnemosune, holding the Scroll of Memory, looks down upon her first-born child, who, in turn, looks down upon the lyre. almost as though she is 'remembering' the song inscribed in her mother's scroll. Lekythos, 5th century BC. Museo Archeologico Nazional di Siracusa.

In this way, Lawfulness and Memory, belonging to the original principles of Origin, are brought into the new order, creating the next stages of differentiation, inspiration and understanding.

Fig. 28. Demeter of Knidos. Marble statue. 330 BC. British Museum. London.

Zeus unites with his sister Demeter, goddess of the Harvest, who gives birth to Persephone, who was carried into the underworld by Hades, becoming symbolically the seed beneath the Earth.

Fig. 29. Persephone and Hades in the Underworld holding the fruits of the Earth in winter. Terracotta, Locri. 500-450 BC. Cleveland Museum of Art.

The ritual of her return to the upperworld each spring, as the new shoot, was celebrated every autumn for over 2000 years in the Eleusinian Mysteries, becoming a symbol of death and rebirth for all creation.

There was also a union between Zeus and Leto, daughter of the Titan divinities of Coios and Phoibe, Son and Moon. Leto in turn gives birth to Artemis, goddess of the Moon, huntress and guardian of the Animals – here feeding a swan.

Fig. 30. Artemis, crowned, feeding a Swan. She wears a spotted animal skin over her shoulder, with a decorated quiver, recalling her ancient role as Goddess of the Wild Animals, long preceding Zeus. Attic Red Figure, White Ground, Lekythos. Attributed to the Pan Painter. c. 500 - 459 BC. State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

The brother of Artemis was Apollo, god of clarity and form, also of poetry and song, music dance, prophecy and healing.

Fig. 31. Apollo playing the lyre that Hermes gave him, pouring a libation. White Kylix. 490 BC. Delphi Museum.

Fig. 32. Hermes flying over the clouds with his winged sandals, holding the lyre he made from the shell of a tortoise, with his Caduceus leading the way – originally male and female serpents intertwined around a central pole as a symbol of reconciliation of opposites. Red-figure vase. c. 495 BC. British Museum.

Hermes, the trickster god of Imagination, was born in a dusky cave, far from the eyes of human beings. His father was Zeus and his mother was Maia, the shy goddess, the eldest of the seven Sisters of the Constellation of the Pleiades, daughters of Atlas and Pleone.

Not last nor least, Zeus unites with *Metis*, goddess of Forethought, whom he then swallows to outwit a prophecy that she would bear a child greater than himself. So *Athena* 'with the gleaming eyes,' had to be born through his head, with *Haephaistos*, the Smith god, cracking his head open with an axe. Nonetheless, she inherited the wisdom of her Mother *Metis*, and became guardian of the arts, and crafts – such as making a pot, steering a ship, riding a horse - in peace and war, protecting heroes through far-seeing reflection and good counsel. She gave the olive tree to Athens in a contest with Poseidon who offered a horse, and she became Patron of the city which bears her name.

Fig. 33. Athena born through the head of Zeus. Zeus is seated, holding his lightning-bolt, while Hephaestos releases Athena with a blow of his axe to Zeus's skull, waving his hand, making the typical gesture of Eileithea, the goddess of childbirth. Athena emerges holding her shield. Attic Black Figure Kylix, c. 555-550 BC. British Museum.

Only then does Zeus marry his sister, cow-eyed Hera, suggestive of a union with the native Pelasgian culture of animal husbandry. And thereafter continues his dalliances with many other goddesses and nymphs - bringing the history and lore of the land into the new imaginal story.

Fig. 34. Zeus and Hera. Temple ba.s-relief. c. 500 BC. Museo Nazionale, Palermo, Sicily.

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Then there is the ubiquitus, mysterious, and dynamic god Dionysos.

Plato, talking in the *Laws* of different kinds of songs, suggests, almost as an afterthought, that 'the birth of Dionysos I suppose – is called *Dithyramb*.' [20] 'Dithyramb' was the Greeks' name for an ecstatic song and dance, imagined as happening at the ritual birth of Dionysos which was the wild and thrilling dance of Spring, the Renewal of the Year, and was re-enacted in the Greek Tragedies. Aristotle writes that 'Tragedy begins with the leaders of the Dithyramb.' [21]

The classical scholar Jane Harrison explains that Dionysos is born out of the dithyramb: that is, born out of a communal ecstasy in the ritual dances of celebration at the New Year, and over the years is gradually detached from the rite and gathers a life and character of his own, and only later is sculpted and painted in Art. [22]

> Come, O Dithyrambos, Bacchos, come…
> Bromios, come, and, coming with you, bring
> Holy hours of your own Holy Spring. [23]

Fig. 35. Dionysos dancing with Satyrs. Attic red-figure cup interior by the Brygos Painter. c. 490-480 BC. Cabinet des Medailles, Paris.

Dionysos was also incarnated in the Holy Bull, he who begins the ploughing and sowing of the New Year in Spring. Pindar writes:

> Whence did appear the Graces of Dionysos,
> With the Bull-driving Dithyramb? [24]

The most striking image in dramatic form of the rebirth of the Year Spirit comes from Crete - *The Hymn of the Kouretes* - where it was both a dithyrambic spring ritual and also an initiation. It was written down in the 3rd century BC, but is undoubtedly much older, leading back to Mycenaean if not Minoan times:

> Io, Kouros most Great I give you hail, Kronian,
> Lord of all that is wet and gleaming,
> you have come at the head of your Daimones.
> To Dikte for the year, Oh march and rejoice in the dance and song…
> To us also leap for full jars, and leap for fleecy flocks,
> And leap for fields of fruit, and for hives to bring increase…
> And leap for our young citizens and for goodly Themis. [25]

All the stories of Dionysos's birth are stories of rebirth: he is twice-born, child of the double door. In Olympian myth, he was either torn from the burning womb of his mother, *Semele*, by Hermes and sewed into his father Zeus's thigh to be born a second time; or he was born as a horned infant, and dismembered by the Titans into the lunar figure of 7 or 14 pieces while contemplating his image in a mirror. The Titans left the heart which was then swallowed by his mother – Rhea or Demeter - from whom he was born again. Though, since the mirror was believed to catch the soul as well as the image, his return was never in doubt. His various mothers are all involved with the seed which dies beneath the Earth in winter to be born again in spring: Semele, whose name means 'Seed;' Demeter, Goddess of the Harvest; and in yet another tale, her daughter, Persephone or *Kore*, the feminine form of sprout, *Koros,* when, so it was said, her father Zeus appeared in her cave in Crete in the form of a snake.

The pressing of the grape into wine became a symbol of transformation for plants and humans alike.

Fig. 36. Dionysos seated with grapes and his thiasus. Attic black-figure crater. c. 525-500 BC. The Louvre.

In ancient Greece, this idea of rebirth was carried through the distinction between two kinds of life: *Zoe,* Infinite Life, and *Bios*, Finite life in time - and both were found in the life of the Moon. The visible phases of the Moon were called Bios; the cycle of the Moon was called Zoe. The light phases of the Moon, dying into the dark, and reappearing after three days as the thin curved crescent of the new cycle, were understood as being reborn through immersion in the eternal: *Bios* returned to *Zoe* to be reborn. These stages were interpreted as common to both Moon, Earth, and humanity, the lunar and human condition alike. This model, coming originally from the way the Moon's waning had been experienced as a gradual dying, and the three days dark as a death, extended naturally into the periodic dissolution and regeneration of all beings, especially the seasons of plants as the source of food. The only difference was that, in the returning crescent, the rebirth of the Moon could be seen and witnessed, and tragedy transformed thereby into myth. [26]

In the rituals of Dionysos, the wine offered to the participants was understood to be the *Zoe* of the god. [27]

The lunar nature of Dionysos – born, in one tale, with horns like the crescent Moon - gleams through his dismemberment into fourteen pieces, the fourteen days of the Waning Moon, a *coincidence* which reminded Herodotus of the Egyptian god Osiris. [28] Osiris, also a lunar god, was himself dismembered into fourteen pieces by his brother Seth at the Full Moon, when the god was lamented, searched for, discovered and reconstituted as a whole, at which mourning was changed into joy. All over the Near East, the dying and resurrected goddess or god - as the Moon, the Plant, the Tree, the Year and the Sun, and later, taking 'human' form as Osiris, Inanna, Dumuzi-Tammuz, Zagreus, Attis, Adonis, Persephone, Orpheus, Bacchos and Dionysos - returned in due time to *Zoe* which, as *bios*, lives and dies to live again. [29] This archetypal pattern extends, in the imagery, even into Christian symbolism, with the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus still timed to the first Full Moon after the Spring Equinox.

Such was the tradition from which Dionysos arose, and all Tragedies took place in the theatre dedicated to the god. When the intensity of the play became overwhelming, the Greeks would clap their hands and cry *Theos* (god) – 'it shines,' 'it lightens' – they were filled with *enthusiasm* - *en theos* - when the god was 'in' them. But in the theatre when the play was *not* working, the Athenians would shout '*Ouden Dionisos'* - 'It is *Not* Dionysos.' Or, as the Homeric *Hymn to Dionysos* has it: 'Anyone who forgets you, cannot remember sacred song.' [30]

Only later did Dionysos became a god *of* ecstasy, wine, transformation and renewal, just as Zeus became a god *of* light, thunder and lightning.

Fig. 37. Dionysos, abducted by pirates, transforming the mast of the ship into vines, and the pirates into dolphins. Detail from 'The Sea Journey of Dionysos.' Black-figure vase painting by Ezekias. 555-510 BC. Wikimedia Commons.

* * *

The relationship between the early Mycenaean culture in Crete, beginning around 2000 BC, and the later Pelasgian and Mycenaean cultures in Greece, around 800 BC - had always been recognized in art, ritual and custom. But it had never been confirmed through language. Astonishingly, it was not until 1952 that Michael Ventris, a classicist and philologist, deciphered Mycenaean Linear B writing on tablets, found mostly in Crete, by working out that they were an early form of Greek. [31] This made it possible to read for the first time the original Mycenaean names of the gods and goddesses, engraved into baked clay, and to discover that many of the gods and goddesses, assumed to have been native to Greece, had been brought by the Mycenaeans themselves, probably some time after the tsunami of 1600 BC in Crete, following the massive volcanic earthquake nearby in Thera.

In Linear B writing Dionysos was called *di-wo-nu-so*. Hermes, the trickster god of Imagination, comes up in Linear B tablets five times, once as *E-ma-ai Areias*, suggestive of Hermes the Ram, an old fertility god. So also, do Zeus *Diktaios*, *Erinyes* as Demeter, *Eleutha* as Artemis, *Paean* as Apollo, *Atana* as Athena who is offered a jar of honey, Poseidon, Hera, as well as the Lady of the Labyrinth, Lady of Grain, and Priestess of the Winds, among others. In Mycenaean Greek Ma-*ka* is transliterated as Ma-*ga*, containing the root '*ga'* - *Mother Gaia*. [32] The earlier Minoan writing – called Linear A - has not yet been deciphered.

So, many of the Greek myths may now be seen as a unique synthesis of two originally separate cultures. For when the nomadic Sun and Storm God-oriented Achaeans entered the land of the native Earth and Moon Goddess-oriented Pelasgians, an entirely new creative fusion of both cultures was born.

Fig. 38. Odysseus lashed to the mast, resisting the song of the Sirens who threaten to drown his ship. Detail from an Attic red-figured stamnos. c 480-470 BC. From Vulci. (Public Domain).

This fusion brought forth the gods and heroes of Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, and Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in the 8th century BC, with their distinct personalities, their passionate goals and relationships, and their all too familiar virtues and vices.

These characters, and their destinies, were further explored in the 6th and 5th centuries through the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, among others. Though for Nietzsche, in his book *The Birth of Tragedy*, all the heroes of Tragedy were but 'masks of Dionysos - he whose other name was *Pentheus*, Suffering.' [33]

Greek Artists of the sixth and fifth centuries BC often depicted the relationship between the new Mycenaeans and the native Pelasgians as a dramatic conflict of values, where the divine god or hero tests himself against the native goddess or heroine, and new energies are released which change the nature of things, and a new equilibrium is achieved.

These stories are now often called 'hero myths' [34] – 'hero' coming from the Greek *hiera*, meaning 'sacred.' Yet the wisdom of a goddess – usually Athena – sometimes joined by the god Hermes - is necessary for the hero to survive.

Fig. 39. Perseus slaying the Gorgon. Metope of Temple C at Selinunte. c. 560-550 BC. Archaeological Museum, Palermo.

Perseus, the legendary founder of Mycene, son of Zeus and Danae, a mortal women, is sent by the malicious king of Serifos who has imprisoned his mother, to bring back the head of the Gorgon, whose glance turns everyone to stone. The goddess Athena gives Perseus a mirror to see the Medusa only in reflection, so he did not have to look at her, while Hermes gives Perseus his own winged sandals to escape the force-field of her rage. The Gorgon holds in her lap her horse Pegasos, son of Poseidon, who, once released, flies to Mount Helion to be with the Muses, daughters of Mnemosune, and stamps his foot on the mountain bringing forth a spring of gushing water.

Fig. 40. Perseus escaping on the winged sandals of Hermes after slaying the Gorgon. Athena, with her long staff, is urging him to leave. Attic red figure. Attributed to the Pan Painter. 468 BC. British Museum..

Fig. 41. Athena protecting Theseus, whose task was to slay the Cretan Minotaur. Attic red-figure. c. 420-410 BC. National Archaeological Museum of Spain, Madrid.

The gift of Ariadne's thread to guide the way – the lunar weaving of old – allowed Theseus to find the centre of the dark labyrinth, where he slew the Minotaur, and then to wind his way back out again to the light. Athena is depicted as the guardian and inspiration of the heroic quest.

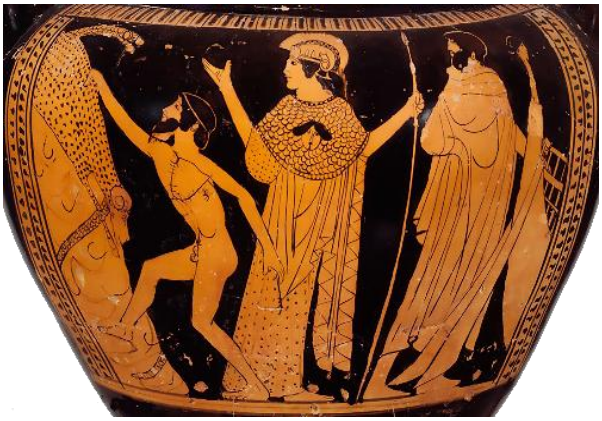

Fig. 42. Athena, with the Gorgan's head upon her gown, watches over Jason as he seizes the Golden Fleece. Red figure vase. 485 BC. Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Fig. 43. In another, probably older, version of the myth, Athena, in her cloak of snakes, reminiscent of the Minoan goddess, is bringing Jason out of the underworld – from death to life. The golden fleece hangs on the tree above the serpent's head. Red figure vase. 480 BC. Vatican Museo Gregoriano Etrusco.

But, without the blessing from the goddess, the hero often suffers or dies: as did the hunter Actaion, who offended the goddess Artemis, surprisiing her while she was bathing, and was torn apart by his own hounds.

Fig. 44. Artemis aiming at Aktaion, who is being torn to pieces by his own hounds. Athenian red-figure bell krater c. 5th B.C. Museum of Fine Arts Boston. (not shown in the film).

Yet while the new order gave a voice to the images of the old order, reaching back at least a thousand years earlier, it also dramatized a *new* kind of story in which the god is the active player and the goddess carries the values which make the action matter, giving it perspective and meaning. But the goddesses are not so often the primary agents of their own dramas, as the ancient images of Minoan Crete suggest they once were. We no longer see, for instance, the Minoan goddess holding up the snakes of life and death in her hands.

Fig. 45. Minoan goddess, with a crown of snakes around her head and a feline animal seated upon her head, is holding up the serpents of life and death. Heraklion Museum, Crete. c. 1600 BC.

* * *

It is all the more significant, then, that Gaia, Mother Goddess Earth, persists in the new Olympian conversation.

In the Imagination of ancient Greece, Gaia was never left behind as a legend at the beginning of things. Whenever the drive of creation was required to reach a new level, she continued to play an essential role, and crucially in the movement of the Seasons and the renewal of the year, which involve the rhythmic cycles of life, death and rebirth in all creation. It is Gaia who initiates the drama by growing a magical narcissus with a hundred blooms as a ‘snare’ for Persephone, whose other name, Kore, means ‘shoot.’ So enticing is the narcissus that Persephone picks it (ending the

plant's life above ground) and so falls into the dark underworld (herself dropping as the seed), where she becomes the bride of Hades (Death). Through Demeter's rage at the loss of her daughter which turns the land barren, Persephone returns every spring as the reborn shoot to her Mother, Demeter, Goddess of the Harvest, Gaia's own grand-daughter. This natural drama was the source and inspiration of the Eleusinian Mysteries, celebrated every autumn for over 2000 years in Eleusis, becoming a symbol of death and rebirth for all creation.

Fig. 46. The Reunion of Demeter and Persephone as the Spring. Marble bas-relief. 460 BC. The Louvre, Paris.

To summarize: Gaia was the intelligence within creation: she brought time into being and freed it from the eternal round; she was the mover of growth as the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, and the timing of growth in the seasons. She was the home for the dead, and the container for the imagining of death through her grand-daughter Demeter, and Demeter's daughter Persephone - the dead were called *Demetrioi.* Gaia was the first oracle of prophecy at Delphi, a word which itself meant 'womb,' handing over to her daughter Themis, who was later replaced in the new hierarchy by Zeus's son, Apollo. Priestesses, sitting in the hot sun beside cracks in the rock, would still open the Delphic rituals with an invocation to Gaia:

> 'I give first place of honour in my prayer to her
> who of the gods first prophesied, Gaia.' [35]

In this way Gaia continued to be honoured as a living presence whose laws were written into the lives of all creation. It followed that Gaia's law was related to the moral law of human beings; or, we might say, Nature and human nature, at the deepest level, were not separately configured. In other words, the order of Nature was for the Greeks a dynamic moral order, implicating human life.

A legendary way of saying this is to have the first king 'crowned' by Gaia. And so it was that Erechthonius, the first king of Athens, was born vicariously by the semen of Hephaistos, son of

Hera, the blacksmith of the gods, falling into the fruitful womb of Earth. Athena, patron of Athens, escaping rape from Hephaistos, had brushed away his semen onto the ground, which Gaia had received in her capacious lap, nourished it, and in due time brought forth the child into the light, offering him back to Athena, who offered him in turn as King of Athens. (In ancient Egypt also, the Pharoah received his right to rule by being seated on the 'Lap of the Goddess Isis,' which was his throne). Gaia, bringing the new-born child out of her unfathomable depths, embodies the ever-renewing mystery of birth.

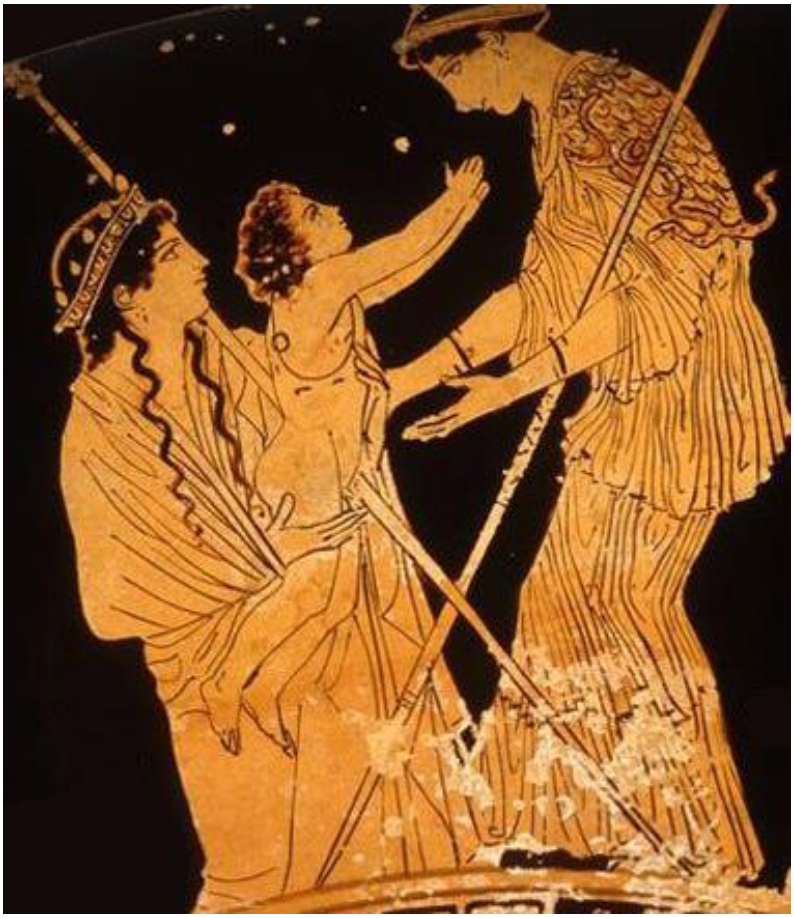

Fig. 47. Gaia holding up the child Erechthonius to Athena, with Hephaistos watching behind her (not shown). Red-vase painting. c. 470 BC. Staatliche Antikensamlung, München.

We can see that Gaia was an image far beyond what many people generally mean now by 'Earth.' She was the Mother who brought forth the universe from herself, so all her children were children of the universe, formed from her substance, sharing in her sacred source. Yet Gaia was also the everyday Greek word for Earth – the soil we dig, the ground we tread upon - only the context distinguished them. The Earth who gives us grain' was also the 'Mother who feeds the world.' The two terms were permeable to each other, so the early Greek mind could move fluidly between them without having to reach for a different kind of language to explain 'which one' was meant. So Gaia, as Goddess, globe and ground, was always transparent to the deeper poetic vision. This is shown in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex,* which draws an Earth intimately related to the moral life

of humanity, from which it followed that Gaia's law could be profoundly disturbed by the unlawful and immoral behaviour of human beings.

Oedipus became King of Thebes by answering the question of the Sphinx: 'What goes on four feet in the morning, two feet at noon, and three feet in the evening?'

Fig. 48. Oedipus seated before the Sphinx. Attic red-figure kylix. 470 BC. Museo Gregoriano, Vatican, Rome.

'A person,' he replied. 'A person as a baby in the morning of their life crawls on four feet (hands and knees). As an adult in the noon of their life, they walk on two feet, and in the evening of life the two feet need a stick, making three feet.

Once he is King, Oedipus is quite content in his unconsciousness until Earth suffers. Suddenly, the land of Thebes begins to die:

> A blight is on the fruitful plants of the earth,
> A blight is on the cattle in the fields,
> A blight is on our women that no children
> are born to them. [36]

It is Gaia's protest which initiates the drama of Oedipus's awakening to who he is and what he has done: the slaying of his father and the marrying of his mother.

Reluctantly, Oedipus sends to the Delphic Oracle of Phoebus Apollo to reveal the cause.

Fig. 49. Delphi, showing the Theatre and the rectangular Temple of Apollo.

Fig. 50. The Pythia giving the Oracle at Delphi. Red-figure vase. c. 490-480 BC. Toledo Museum of Art, USA.

The Oracle, whose first law was 'Know thyself' and whose second law was 'Nothing in excess,' now defines for all time the meaning of pollution as a human crime against the divine order, the profaning of what is sacred.

> King Phoebus in plain words commanded us
> to drive out a pollution from our land,
> pollution grown ingrained within the land. [37]

The pollution is the presence of the new king, who does *not* 'know himself' and *has* acted 'in excess.' But when Oedipus discovers that he is *himself* the pollution, he leaves the city, and harmony between the human and divine order is restored, and Earth comes back to life. It is significant that, even *without* Oedipus's intention to do wrong, pollution occured. Later, in reverse, in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, the place, Colonus, where the older and wiser Oedipus is to lay his body in the Earth, will bring blessings to the people who live there. Again, Gaia and the children of Gaia are shown to be profoundly related.

So here, what happens to humans happens to Earth, and what happens to Earth happens to humans – the soul of the one is also the soul of the other. Or, to put it another way, the human story and the universe story are one and the same.

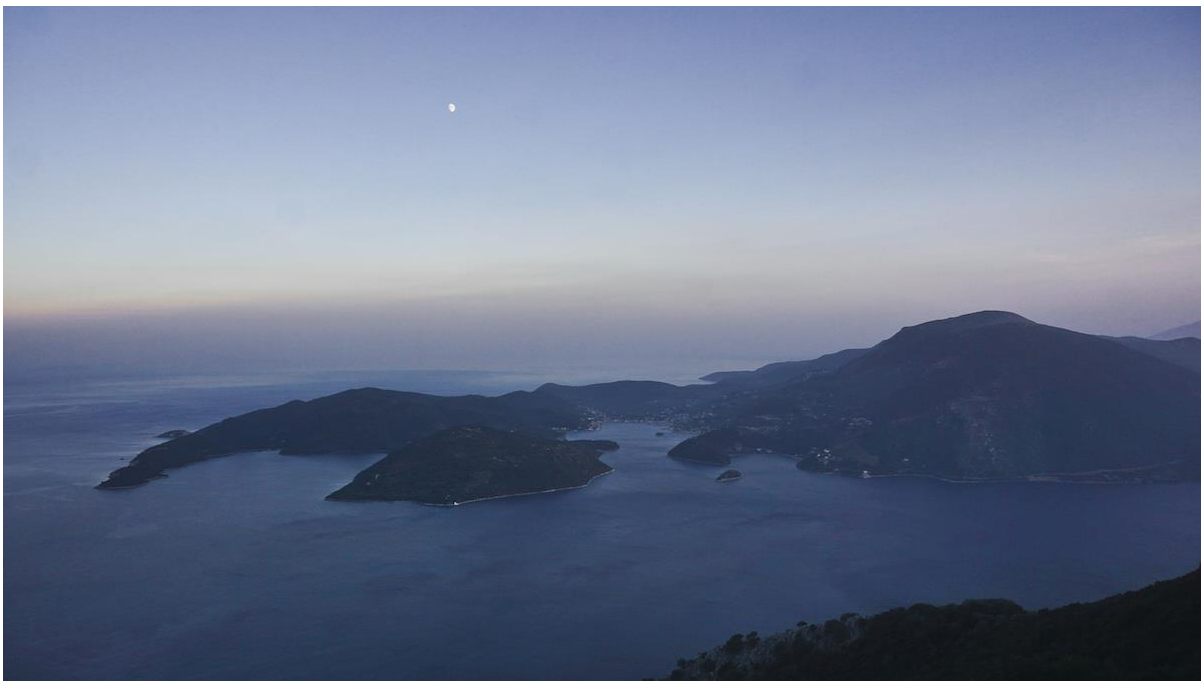

Fig. 51. The Island of Ithaka.

Ancient Greek culture lives on in the Imagination of the West in more ways than we probably know. And especially, perhaps, in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* – the story of the Trojan War, and then Odysseus's journey home to Ithaka - which has become a symbol for all kinds of journeying, and the many ways of coming home.

To end with the Greek 20th century poet Constantine Cavafy's poem - *Ithaka* - translated by Edmund Keeley.

ITHAKA

As you set out for Ithaka
hope your road is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
Laistrygonians, Cyclops,
angry Poseidon—don't be afraid of them:
you'll never find things like that on your way
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,
as long as a rare excitement
stirs your spirit and your body.
Laistrygonians, Cyclops,
wild Poseidon—you won't encounter them
unless you bring them along inside your soul,
unless your soul sets them up in front of you.

Hope your road is a long one.
May there be many summer mornings when,
with what pleasure, what joy,
you enter harbors you're seeing for the first time;
may you stop at Phoenician trading stations
to buy fine things,

mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,

sensual perfume of every kind—

as many sensual perfumes as you can;

and may you visit many Egyptian cities

to learn and go on learning from their scholars.

Keep Ithaka always in your mind.

Arriving there is what you're destined for.

But don't hurry the journey at all.

Better if it lasts for years,

so you're old by the time you reach the island,

wealthy with all you've gained on the way,

not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.

Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.

Without her you wouldn't have set out.

She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.

Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,

you'll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean. [38]

Illustrations

Fig. 15. Selene, Goddess of the Moon, riding across the sky, as though reining in her horses at the Full Moon, which she wears upon her head. Red-figure cup by the Brygos Painter, Vulci. 490 BC. Staatlich Museen zu Berlin.

Fig. 16. The Titan Atlas seated beside Gaia who stands beside him. Apulian red-figure volute krater c. 4th century B.C. Dallas Museum of Art.

Fig. 17. Chronos (Kronos), statue. Roman. 1st century AD. Vatican, Royal Cast Collection, Copenhagen.

Fig. 18. Two Erinyes in the underworld, wearing hunting clothes, with vipers winding round their arms and through their hair. Apulian Red Figure Krater. c. 340 BC. Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe.

Fig. 19. Aphrodite's birth from the waves was re-enacted every year in spring as a ceremony of rebirth. Marble bas relief known as the Ludovisi Throne. c. 470-460 BC. Museo Nazionale Romano di Palazzo Attemps, Rome.

Fig. 20. Poseidon, god of the Sea, with his trident, also known as the Earth-Shaker and creator of the Horse. Corinthian plaque. 550-525 BC. The Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 21. Rhea giving Chronos a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes. Pelike by the Nausikaa painter. 460 BC. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Fig. 22. Zeus with eagle and lightning. Etruscan red-figure vase. c. 5th century BC. The Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 23. Temple of Dodona, 22 km south west of Ioannina, Epiros, Northern Greece. The theatre was constructed in Hellenistic times (4th century BC – 41 BC).

Fig. 24. Zeus slaying Typhon. Red-figure vase painting. c. 550. BC. Staatliche Antikensammlungen, München.

Fig. 25. Poseidon fighting the giant Polybotes, while Gaia rises from the ground to plead for the life of her son. Attic red-figure Vase. Aristophanes Painter. c. 410-400 BC. Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Berlin.

Fig. 26. Themis on the tripod of Delphi, giving a prophecy to King Aegeus. Athenian red-figure kylix, a drinking vase. c. 5th century BC. Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Berlin.

Fig. 27. Mnemosune, standing, and Kalliope, her daughter, playing the lyre. Lekythos, 5th century BC. Museo Archeologico Nazional di Siracusa.

Fig. 28. Demeter of Knidos. Marble statue. 330 BC. British Museum. London.

Fig. 29. Persephone and Hades in the Underworld holding the fruits of the Earth in winter. Terracotta, Locri. 500-450 BC. Cleveland Museum of Art. From Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 30. Artemis, crowned, feeding a Swan. Attic red-figure (white ground) Lekythos. Attributed to the Pan Painter. c. 500 - 459 BC. State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

Fig. 31. Apollo playing the lyre that Hermes gave him, pouring a libation. White Kylix. 490 BC. Delphi Museum.

Fig. 32. Hermes flying over the clouds with his winged sandals, holding the lyre he made from the shell of a tortoise, with his Caduceus leading the way – originally male and female serpents intertwined around a central pole as a symbol of reconciliation of opposites. Red-figure vase. c. 495 BC. British Museum.

Fig. 33. Athena born through the head of Zeus. Hephaestos releases Athena with a blow of his axe to Zeus's skull, waving his hand, making the typical gesture of Eileithea, the goddess of childbirth. Athena emerges holding her shield. Attic black-figure Kylix, c. 555-550 BC. British Museum.

Fig. 34. Zeus and Hera. Temple bas relief. c. 500 BC. Museo Nazionale, Palermo, Sicily.

Fig. 35. Dionysos dancing with Satyrs. Attic red-figure cup interior by the Brygos Painter. c. 490-480 BC. Cabinet des Medailles, Paris. Wikimedia, Public Domain.

Fig. 36. Dionysos seated with grapes and his thiasus. Attic black-figure crater. c. 525-500 BC. The Louvre. Wikimedia, Public Domain.

Fig. 37. Detail from The Sea Journey of Dionysos. Black-figure vase painting by Ezekias. 555-510 BC. Stattliche Antikensamlung und Glyptothek, Munich, Germany.

Fig. 38. Odysseus lashed to the mast, resisting the Sirens. Detail from an Attic red-figured stamnos. c. 480-470 BC. From Vulci. (Public Domain).

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Fig. 48. Oedipus seated before the Sphinx. Attic red-figure kylix. 470 BC. Museo Gregoriano, Vatican, Rome.

Fig. 49. Delphi, showing the Theatre and the rectangular Temple of Apollo.

Fig. 50.The Pythia giving the Oracle at Delphi. Red-figure vase. c. 490-480 BC. Toledo Museum of Art, USA.

Fig. 51. The Island of Ithaka.

Endnotes

1. 'Hymn to Gaia, Mother of All,' Number 30, The Homeric Hymns, trans. Jules Cashford, London, Penguin Classics, 2003.

2. Tutorial from Satish Kumar in the Schumacher College Pub, Dartington, Devon!

3. See Marija Gimbutas, The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500-3500 BC: Myths and Cult Images, London, Thames and Hudson, 1982, and Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God: Primitive *Mythology*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976.

4. See Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Godddess: Evolution of an Image*, Penguin Books, London, 1993, Chapters 1-3 and 8-9.

5. Owen Barfield, *History in English Words*, Edinburgh, Floris Books, 1985.

6. *Hesiod and Theognis*, trans. Dorothea Wender, Harmondsworth, Penguin Classics, 1973. lines following 116-218.

7. Hesiod, *op. cit.*, lines 127-135.

8. Heracleitus, quoted in Plato, *Cratylus*, 401D.

9. Hesiod, *op. cit*., lines 178-184.

10. W.B. Yeats 'Essay on Magic,' in *Essays and Introductions*, London, Macmillan, 1961, p. 50.

11. See Philip Larkin's poem 'Vers de Société': '...the moon / Thinned to an air-sharpened blade.'

12. Plato, *The Timaeus*, 37, C, D.

13. See Baring and Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess*, chapter 9, pp 349-90. Aeschylus writes in his *Danaides*:

> 'The great and amorous sky curved over the earth, and lay upon her as a pure lover. The rain, the humid flux descending from heaven for both man and animal, for both thick and strong, germinated the wheat, swelled the furrows with fecund mud and brought forth the buds in the orchards. And it is I who empowered these moist espousals, I the great Aphrodite.' (p. 353).

14. Jules Cashford, *The Mysteries of Osiris*, Ediciones Atalanta, 2010, and Kingfisher Art Productions, 2020, p. 62.

15. Shakespeare, Sonnet 19.

16. See David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980, passim. The Quantum Physicist David Bohm warns that consciousness itself is 'biased' towards fragmenting the world - a fragmentation which it reifies in grammar by reaching for nouns rather than verbs to select and relate to discrete single things, predisposing us to see subjects and objects - ourselves as subjects within and the world as object without. Whereas when verbs are primary, we are related to the flowing of life between all things.

17. Baring and Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess*, Chapter 5, pp. 175-224.

18. Pindar, Fragment, c. 5th century BC. Trans. Sandys, *Greek Lyric*, c. 5th c BC.

Followers of Zeus claimed that it was with him that Themis produced the Moirai. But a fragment of the Poet Pindar says that the Moirai were already present at the nuptials of Zeus and Themis, and that in fact the Moirai rose with Themis from the springs of Okeanos, the encircling world-ocean and accompanied her up the bright sun-path to meet Zeus at Mount Olympos: "First did the Moirai in their golden chariot bring heavenly Themis, wise in counsel, by a gleaming pathway from the springs of Okeanos to the sacred stair of Olympos, there to be the primal bride of Zeus Soter (the Saviour)."

19. Hesiod, *Theogony*, line 222.

20. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. H.D.P. Lee, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1955, 700 B.

21. Aristotle, *Poetics*, I. Bywater, Trans. *Aristotle and the Art of Poetry*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1920.

22. Jane Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, London, Williams & Norgate, 1913, p. 191.

23. Harrison, *op. cit*., London : Williams and Norgate, 1913, p. 102. Dithyrambos found in Delphi

> Come, O Dithyrambos, Bacchos, come…
> Bromios, come, and, coming with you, bring
> Holy hours of your own Holy Spring.

24. Harrison, *op. cit.*, 1913, p. 83.

25. *The Hymn of the Kouretes*, in Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*, London, Merlin Press, 1963, pp. 7-8.

26. Jules Cashford, *The Moon: Symbol of Transformation*, pp. 34-36.

27. See Karl Kerenyi, *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, trans. Ralph Manheim, Princeton University Press, 1976. xxxi-xxxvii. ‘
In a second birth *Zoe* simply continues with a new *bios*, which may be called the ‘*Bios* of Zoe.’

28. Cashford, *The Mysteries of Osiris*, 1992, pp. 88-90.

29. Cashford, *The Moon*, *op. cit*., chapter One, pp. 36-41; 257-268.

30. ‘Hymn to Dionysos,’ trans. Cashford, *The Homeric Hymns*, Number VII, pp. 100-105.

31. John Chadwick, *The Decipherment of Linear B*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1958. See also Jane Harrison, *Mythology*, Harbinger Book, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc, New York and Burlinghame, 1963.

32. In Mycenaean Greek *Ma-ka* (transliterated as *Ma-ga*, "Mother Gaia") also contains the root *ga-* See Robert S. P. Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, Leiden, Brill, 2009, pp. 269–270 (s.v. "γῆ").

33. Friedrich Nietsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Chapter 10.

34. See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Bollingen Series XVII, 2nd edn., Princeton N.J. Princeton University Press, 1968.

35. Aeschylus, *The Eumenides*, lines. 1-2. It continues: ‘Then Themis, her daughter, who, as the story says, succeeded to the seat of prophecy; and in the third allotment, without urging, her sister willing, Phoebe took her place, another child of Earth and yet another of the Titan breed. And it was she who gave the privilege to Apollo as a birthday gift, who accordingly took upon himself the name of Phoebus.’

36. Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, Grene, David and Lattimore, Richmond, eds., *Greek Tragedies*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1963, lines 24-8.

37. *Ibid*., lines 97-100.

38. C. P. Cavafy, *Collected Poems*. Translated by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, Princeton University Press, 1975.

APPENDIX

The Theatre of Dionysos

Tragedy – *tragodia* - meant literally 'goat-song' – *tragos*, meaning 'goat' – the animal who was later sacrificed instead of the original bull. Tragedies were performed at the theatre of Dionysos in Athens at the Great Spring Festival of Dionysos, which lasted five days when the whole city was under sanctity, a taboo. Even in Aristotle's lifetime, Livy says that, in 361 BC, Greek Tragedies were brought into Rome on religious grounds, as a *katharmos* against a pestilence. (Bywater, 1920: 16) The theatre opened at sunrise, and the whole day was consecrated. On the eve of the performance there was a torchlight procession when the image of Dionysos was brought into the theatre and set down in the orchestra, while young Athenian men led his animal form into the precinct – originally a beautiful bull, who had to be 'worthy of the god,' and was to be sacrificed - literally 'made sacred.' Suggestively, the table on which the later goat was to be sacrificed was called *Eleos* - the same word for 'pity.' The Priests of Dionysos, Apollo, Zeus and Asklepios sat in the front row, with the Priest of Dionysos in the centre. The orchestra was where the Chorus would dance, a space round like the threshing floors (*Koroi) (*same root), where the tillers of the Earth danced when they rested from sowing their seed.

The Oracle at Delphi

The second century AD Greek writer Plutarch, talking of '*The E at Delphi*,' writes:

'The Inscription "Know thyself" written above the entrance to the temple of Apollo at Delphi is not so much an injunction as a question. It demands a knowledge to the question "Who art thou?" Or how could you answer it? And which self? Do you know the bodily and and mortal or the incorporeal and immortal self?. In the *Alcibiades,* Socrates says that he who orders "know thyself"

bids us know the soul and goes on to say that one who knows only what is of the body "knows the things that are his but not himself." 1.5.1.5

The Etymology of 'Pollution'

The word for pollution in Greek is *miasma,* from *miaino*, to stain, coming into Latin via *polluere*, to soil, defile, contaminate, and further back from Proto-Indo-European (PIE) *leu*, to make dirty. All these terms draw on the original archetypal distinction between clean and unclean, which originally carried the further meanings of sacred and profane – that is, an ultimate value. The Greek word *Katharsis,* from the verb *Kathairo,* to cleanse, draws on these dual meanings, as does the 'immaculate' conception of the Virgin Mary, coming from the Latin *immaculatus,* meaning literally 'unstained, 'not spotted or defiled' - in body and spirit.

Suggestions for further reading:

Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to Greek Religion, Themis, Ancient Art and Ritual, Mythology,* etc.

The Iliad, the Odyssey, Hesiod's *Theogony, the Homeric Hymns.*

Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces, The Masks of God: 4 volumes: Primitive Mythology, Occidental Mythology, Oriental Mythology; The Mythic Image. The Inner Reaches of Outer Space.*

Books by Mircea Eliade, Karl Kerenyi, Robert Graves, William Burkert.

Northrop Frye, *The Bible and Literature, Double Vision.*