

Gaia: Then and Now Webinar - January 08, 2022  
Questions from the session and answers from Jules Cashford, presenter

marija.reikalas

Hello. May I ask the exact title and author of the poem about Ithaca? Thank you. Marij R.  
1:24 PM

‘C. P. Cavafe, ‘Ithaka,’ *Collected Poems*, translated by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherard, Princeton University Press, 1975.

edpearkes

"I work with Indigenous tribes in western North America. They hold the “memory of the whole” — In my writing, I am trying to link us with that original memory of the continent. Why has our culture not been able to embrace this way of knowing, based here, in this continent?"

1:25 PM

I wonder if it is because the people who came from Europe brought with them their own, often divisive, European inheritance, drawing on ideas which, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, were already moving away from the Earth into the human mind (John Locke, for instance, ‘consciousness is what happens in a man’s own mind’). Similarly, they brought with them religious convictions which, in much orthodox Christian thought, began more in Heaven than on Earth. The ‘memory of the whole’ embraces everything, and all the proponents of the wars of religion in Europe - between Protestant and Catholic, for instance – seemed to have conquest over the other as itself a religious value, rather than a love for all creatures whatever their faith. We have so much to learn from Indigenous tribes anywhere, especially perhaps in America.

cecilia

"This is wonderful, thank you! How can we translate these myths into more contemporary imagery, to get the message of the sacredness of Nature (and all that is) across?"

1:25 PM

Well, I wonder if we have to begin again from a new place, one of personal relationship – beginning with our own love of particular individual sacred beings of Nature – flowers, birds, animals, bees and butterflies - making friends with them, figuring out their own stories, telling our own stories with and about them, creating a new kind of mythology from our own living experience – one reaching for relationship with the whole? Those miraculous moments when the difference between us and Nature seems to vanish. We are all Children of Earth.

Marita

"Thank you, Jules, for this rich journey through time, bringing renewed respect for sacred Gaia and inspiring a renewal and deepening of our relationship to her."

1:28 PM

Thank you, Marita.

alamospa

How can one see Gaia now within the context of the emerging vision of the James Webb telescope?

1:29 PM

Perhaps more beautiful than ever?

susannabucher

"Thank you for this impressive tour through Greek mythology . It's interesting that you interpret Oedipus as pollution, which makes sense to me. But how do you interpret the fact that Oedipus only ended up killing his father (and doing unwanted wrong) because of a self-fulfilling prophecy (his father wanting to kill him because of a prophecy)? What could this mean with regard to pollution?"

1:29 PM

What a great question. Many of us in the past didn't know what we were doing was so bad, though now at least we do. So there is a parallel:

Even though it wasn't at all 'fair' to Oedipus, could we say that his true nobility came forward when he did know what he had done, albeit unwittingly, and he then immediately acted to remove himself as pollution from the land, and was rewarded for this by Gaia: the Earth he wished to receive him (in Colonos) now blesses him and all those around him, and so had forgiven him his earlier folly, perhaps precisely because he was so horrified at what he had done, and worked - presumably for the rest of his life - to redeem it.

So does it say that - in spite of ourselves bringing the pollution about - even, maybe, just because we did - once we understand that it is we who are responsible, and, like Oedipus, work to undo our wrongs against Gaia and put her first, then maybe we ourselves could at least begin to imagine a world in which Gaia and human beings may again become one with each other - in an inevitably new way.

The challenge then becomes, perhaps, that we can't imagine something better if we are still doing the thing that makes it worse. So, like Oedipus, we have to begin the change from where we are.

andrewldidway

I cant help but see the pattern you mentioned earlier in the video playing out now. Gaia being brought to Greece from India. Or rather being brought back. A similar pattern seems to be playing out today.

1:30 PM

andrewldidway

Is that something you see as well?

1:31 PM

Yes, and even better if 'Gaia' can go beyond countries completely and be a symbol of all Earth as one dynamic living whole.

bentye

"Wonderful presentation Jules, thank you. I wonder if you have any remarks or thoughts on the relationship between Gaia and the anima mundi and the anima archetype. Thank you"  
1:31 PM

I do indeed think there is a relationship between them – as perhaps you do?

If we consider that we also are 'Gaia' - one of the infinite forms of the consciousness of Earth – or Consciousness as Earth – then, in ways we can barely conceive, our new concern with Gaia may also be an aspect of the self-regulation of the whole, suggested in Lovelock's 'Gaia Hypothesis.' In the light of Jung's idea that 'In the Collective Unconscious of the individual, history prepares itself,' we might wonder if 'Gaia' works through the Collective Unconscious, or perhaps, more evocatively, that Gaia is the latest expression of the *Anima Mundi*. (I've just seen that I did include something on this on page 42 of the text). (I have written a booklet on this from an earlier talk which I can send you if you would like to take it further?)

Baileslegal

It seems the question of "what did I do wrong" does go to one aspect of any disruption.  
1:33 PM

Yes, I agree. It is at least a way of accepting responsibility as the first stage of encouraging ourselves to change our behaviour. The Oedipus myth speaks in the original Greek about pollution – *miasma* - being a crime against 'the sacred' – ie Gaia.

tanjathorjussen

"I see that there is now a great awakening of the mother goddess in many communities, and so I think that there is an urgency of conveying this to people in many forms. Thank you for this film/talk."  
1:34 PM

Thank you for pointing this out. It is indeed as though many people and communities are trying to find a new way of relating to our Earth before we harm Her still more.

fcherlow

Does trying to understand all these creation myths differentiate from wholeness...is this something that creates complication as well as consciousness and understanding?  
1:37 PM

Yes, I'm sure trying to understand these creation myths does create complications as well as consciousness and understanding, and we should be aware of this. The rationale behind studying the earlier myths, however, is that there are people within and behind these myths, and in earlier times they took them very seriously as their particular way of relating to their world.

So the aim is, hopefully, to 'get behind' the myths so we can at least have a better chance both at understanding people earlier than ourselves, and also to find out where our own myths – or aspects of them - may have come from. Then we should be in a better position to

reflect consciously upon our own beliefs, as they have been handed down through different cultures and passing centuries. So in the end we are perhaps trying to answer the question: 'why do we think what we think?'!!

debogrady

Is there a relationship between Gaia and Sophia?

1:37 PM

Yes, absolutely. Sophia was understood as the wisdom of Gaia in many cultures when they differentiated between them. They may have different stories, but ultimately they are both aspects of each other as one whole. Anne Baring and myself have written about this in *The Myth of the Goddess*.

paxtiv

Will Aras sponsor a study of the Buddhist pantheon and how it relates to this one?

1:38 PM

Tom Singer will answer this one! It sounds a great idea.

bsvigals

"Marvelous film! Many of the illustrations seem to come from a single source, on the plates or bowls. What was that source and when were they made?"

1:38 PM

There's a text at ARAS of both films with all the images and where they come from (available on ARAS website to everyone, which can be downloaded to study at home), and amazingly they come from all over the place. In ancient Greece, for instance, plates and bowls were decorated with their myths – mostly around the 7<sup>th</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, and many of the earlier illustrations come from paintings on cave walls – anywhere and everywhere the earlier people than ourselves could find to draw and paint.

alanvaughan

Thank you for this lovely imaginative presentation. Interested in cross cultural equivalencies in creation mythologies. Is there a correspondence with Gaia in Egyptian mythology?

1:38 PM

Well, there is a correspondence in feeling - except that in Ancient Egypt there isn't just one Goddess of Earth like Gaia – but there is a whole pantheon of goddesses and gods who weave in and out of each other – loosely structured around the central myth of Isis and Osiris and their son Horus, which is where the third generation of gods and goddesses come, as it were, 'down to Earth.' To abbreviate rather drastically, and taking only the dramatic story: the goddess Isis (called by the Greek Plutarch (2<sup>nd</sup> c.AD) as the Goddess of Nature) is the wife of Osiris, who was the dying and resurrected god, and Horus was their child. When the goddess Isis 'becomes' the rising star Sothis in the sky, she sets off the inundation of the god Nile, who overflowed (understood as the semen of Osiris) and as the waters spread over the parched land – who was Isis bereft of Osiris - the seeds who grew through the receding waters were understood as the birth of Horus, their son, and the growth of the new season and the year..

betterdayspost

“Reverting moral issues to their archetypal base deepens one’s moral sense by \*recalling\* that moralities are transpersonal” ~ James Hillman

1:39 PM

Thank you so much. Wonderful quote.

alanvaughan

Yes we have lost the sacred in relation to our environment to commerce and politics. What is the way forward?

1:40 PM

I think it has to be Each One of Us being faithful to the sacred in relation to our whatever ‘environment’ we are in – in the sense that we bear it in mind – in our choices, and actions, whatever we do that impinges on it, and that is probably most things we do, more than any of us once realised – directly or indirectly – looking for the ‘Gaian’ way – whatever would assist the Earth to flourish.

paxtiv

Do you feel that this mythic story can exclude any other? Don’t we need to be more inclusive?

1:43 PM

This is of course only one mythic story among many, and, indeed, we need to include them all, and the relationships between them, I quite agree. The reason for the focus on Gaia is in one sense because of ‘Lovelock’s Gaia’ in his hypothesis making a bridge back to the original Greek Gaia, and so we have a chance to see the difference between an Earth experienced as sacred and our own which generally speaking is not.

sally.miles

"You spoke of Zeus manifesting the separation from Gaia — there was an image of Zeus, sorry I can’t remember more. BTW thanks for all the magnificent images - so glad you decided you couldn’t do this project without them."

1:44 PM

Thanks, Sally. I’m glad too. The earliest images and tales of Zeus – like in the Temple of Dodona where people would come with their requests written in clay and leave them in the temple – evokes an older Zeus who was not so divisive as the 5<sup>th</sup> century Zeus had become. Also, the tales of Zeus in Crete suggest that in still earlier times he may himself have been once understood as the ever- dying ever-living year god, as in the Dictaion cave in Crete, the much older culture where the Mycenaeans had been living since 2000 BC. (I had to leave some of these discussions out or the film would have been unbearably long, but there are complexities – always to be found in books by Jane Harrison).

sally.miles

Could you say a little more about the separation

1:45 PM

It's really about the beginning of the so-called 'oppositional paradigm' – when tolerance for different and difficult forms of behaviour and action meets an intolerance that refuses what it calls 'compromise.' (It might remind many of us of attitudes to 'growing up'!).

Gaia is inclusive (as she was in the beginning, refusing Ouranos's determination that ugly giants should not be born), and as she was again with Zeus, and so the battle between them occurred. So when Zeus won, he condemned the Titans into Tartarus, the Underworld, and did not try to find a place for them in the upper universe. That's when Zeus 'separates' from Gaia since his split between upper and lower worlds goes against against her 'nature,' which is inclusive and holistic.

It's like the difficult decisions we sometimes have to make – to insist on what we believe (and oppose the other) or hold to our own position while still trying to see virtue in another person's point of view. In the case of ancient Greece, this debate is rather overshadowed by the fact that the followers of the god Zeus are bigger and stronger and there's a lot more of them! While it may look like Gaia loses the debate, it simply goes underground, and the goddesses keep going! The implication of the myths is that Zeus's exclusion of what and who he does not agree with is wrong – a limitation of consciousness. Gaia gives a home to everyone.

rdrwtr

Thank you. Puzzling aspects of years old dreams are coming together.

1:47 PM

What a lovely thought. I'm delighted!

scotthyder08

Dionysos is so complex. I would love more exploration of his archetypal significance.

1:47 PM

Yes, he's probably the most complex of all the goddesses and gods. Perhaps that is because he enacts the 'dance of life' which no-one can pin down, and his archetypal significance may be just that – we can't get hold of him/it – he belongs to our depths - Heraclitus aphorism has it that 'Hades and Dionysos are the same - he is beyond reason, beyond choice – he chooses us, if we're lucky we can dance with him, he is the music while the music lasts, but only he knows when the music ends. He wants to stay a mystery – perhaps because if we work him out we'll lose him!