

## CHAPTER 3

### Analyzing Greek Gods

R. Parker,  
On Greek Religion  
 pp 64-102

It is, the reader may feel, high time to populate the religious system described in the previous two chapters with gods. But the traditional approach of describing the gods one by one obscures some of the most important questions, and it is these that this chapter will confront. To what extent was the divine world, as perceived by the Greeks, full of the sharply differentiated figures so familiar from myth and art but inaccessible to actual experience? Ordinary speech tends to be vaguer, whereas in cult practice the gods are commonly differentiated still further by the addition of epithets. What kind of thing is a god if a river or an abstraction such as "Righteous Indignation" or a living monarch can be one? How important is the differentiation between gods of the heaven and gods of the earth? The first half of the chapter will treat issues such as these. The second will confront the simple-seeming question of how gods differ from one another, if they do. When speaking of individual gods, the ancients ascribe to them "honors," or spheres of activity, apparently specific to themselves; but, as described by ancients and still more by moderns, those spheres of activity seem very frequently to overlap. Was the divine world a market system in which encroachment by a competitor could always occur, or is it the task of scholarship to uncover distinctions that, if at a not fully articulated level, yet structured Greek thought and kept the different powers apart?

#### "The Gods" as Anonymous Collective: Named Gods; Gods with Epithets

At one level, the question "What is a Greek god?" scarcely seems a difficult one to answer. On the pediment of the temple of Zeus at Olympia, Apollo stands forth plastic, majestic, a superb type of imperious young manhood. Gods are mortals without their limitations. And such they are for the most part in myth too. But when gods are spoken of other than in tellings of myth, the perfect clarity of the sculptural image tends to dissolve, even if we set aside as an eccentric minority opinion the view of those who denied that they had human form at all. On the one hand, just as no mortal ever in fact saw Apollo's unshorn locks tossing on his shoulders, so too it was rare in ordinary speech to speak of individual named gods, except in expressions such as "by Zeus." An orator addressing the Athenian assembly would assure his audience of the favor of "the gods" to Athens; he would not tell them of the particular attitude of Zeus or Athena. So too juries were warned of the danger of offending "the gods" by an unjust verdict.

It is in oratory that the preference for this anonymous form of expression is most obvious. But we have every reason to think that oratory is here merely reflecting the norms of everyday speech. Tragedy is full of named gods, but they mostly appear in contexts such as choral odes which are furthest removed from the representation of ordinary language. In the more realistic portions, anonymous "gods" again predominate. In the most mimetic of all genres, the New Comedy of Menander, individual gods are indeed named frequently, but almost without exception in oaths or curses or prayers or with reference to their sanctuaries or cult acts addressed to them; they are not addressed by characters as an explanation for events in the human world. There is in fact no kind of Greek writing in which "the gods" are not often spoken of as a nameless collective.<sup>1</sup>

The distinction between the named gods of myth and the anonymous gods of daily discourse derives, it may be objected, not from a different belief about the nature of the gods but from the limitations of human perception. Mortals may believe in named deities, but they have no way of identifying their individual interventions in the world of experience; the issue is not one of ontology but of epistemology. In one scene in Homer, Diomedes is allowed to see gods present on the battlefield at Troy, but that is temporary

1. Oratory: see Mikalson, *Athenian Popular Religion*, 66-68. I know no general study for tragedy, but see, e.g., my comments in *Sophocles Revisited*, ed. J. Griffin (Oxford, 1999), 16; and cf. J. D. Mikalson, *Homer Thy Gods* (Chapel Hill, 1991), 25. Menander: *Dysk.* 643-44 is an exception, but one readily explicable from the plot.

poetic fantasy. In "reality" only oracles directly inspired by the gods, or poets claiming the inspiration of the Muses, can draw back the veil to reveal the divine agents behind events. Thus, in Herodotus, it is through oracles that we learn of Apollo's negotiations with the Moirai over the destiny of Croesus, of Athena's urgent supplications to Zeus at the time of the Persian invasion.<sup>2</sup> And though in daily speech mortals are chary of claims about the wishes of individual gods, once they turn to cult activity it is always to them that they address themselves. One prays and makes dedications to Athena or Artemis, not "the gods." In sleep too one may see individual gods, because in sleep every individual becomes a kind of seer.

The objection is well made. But another linguistic phenomenon may seem to relate more truly to the very nature of the gods. In many authors, generalizing references to "the gods" alternate with references to "god" or "the god" or "the divine." A detailed study has shown that in a majority of cases singular and plural are interchangeable.<sup>4</sup> One of the central controversies in the study of Greek religion in the nineteenth century concerned polytheism and monotheism: some held that an original monotheism had been corrupted into the polytheism that we know, others saw monotheism struggling to emerge from the polytheistic mire. But no development in either direction in fact occurs. The culture is always polytheistic—it was well said long ago that Greeks typically prayed not to individual gods but to "chords of gods"<sup>5</sup>—but always one in which references to a singular god are entirely normal. It has come to be recognized that the terms of the nineteenth-century controversy were anachronistic: though many issues about the nature of gods (anthropomorphism for instance) were indeed objects of debate, the choice between "one god or many" was not one that even philosophers felt it necessary to worry very much about; it was Christian proselytizing monotheism that first polarized the one and the many.<sup>6</sup> The Greeks were not crypto-monotheists;

2. Hdt. 1.91.2-3; 7.141.3. Scene in Homer: *Il.* 5.127-28.

3. So Sosthenus's mother's dream about Pan (*Men. Dysk.* 411-18) is not an exception to the general point made above about Menander.

4. G. François, *Le polythéisme et l'empire au singulier des mots θεός, δαίμων* (Paris, 1957). On the occasional multiplication of individual gods ("Demeters," "Pans," etc.), see LSS 95 with Sokolowski's references ad loc.

5. An apophthegm of E. G. Welcker, cited by L. Preller, "Das Zwölfgöttersystem der Griechen," *Verhandlungen der neunten Versammlung deutscher Philologen, Schulmänner und Orientalisten zu Jena* (Jena, 1846), 48-56, at 49: "Nicht sowohl einzelne Götter... als ganze Accorde von Göttern." Monotheism v. polytheism: see Konrad, "Greek Gods," 64-71, 90-96, 200-203.

6. Cf. John North, "Pagans, Polytheists and the Pendulum," in *The Spread of Christianity in the First Four Centuries*, ed. W. V. Harris, 125-43 (Leiden, 2005). As North points out, it would not have occurred to Greek or Roman polytheists to define themselves as polytheists when no monotheist alternative was being promoted. In the survey of philosophers' views about the divine in Lucian, *Ikonomeniēpos*, 9, the monotheist position is in fact mentioned (this is already unusual),

for, though "god" could substitute for "the gods," the reverse also applies. But there was always a sense in which the gods were not a collectivity of individuals with individual wills, but rather the uncontrollable and inevitable element shaping and constraining human life and human lives.<sup>7</sup> This element could be spoken of indifferently as "the gods," "god," "the god," "the divine," "the godlike" (*daimonion*), "Zeus," and "fate."

In this sense, the Apollo of the Olympia pediment represents, within a spectrum of ways of envisaging deity, an extreme point of individualization and precision. But in another sense he is less precise than the gods of cult. In cult, gods were normally addressed under a specific epithet such as Athena Hippiā or Apollo Delphinios or Artemis Brauronia. The claim sometimes made that the application of such epithets was invariable is wrong, but certainly the "cultic double name" (which could occasionally grow into a triple or even quadruple name) was the norm; a god with three sanctuaries in a given city would normally bear a different epithet in each. The cult epithet system was thus a central element in that emphasis on the particular sanctuary, the cult as practiced in a particular place, so characteristic of Greek religion; similarly, a god with three major sanctuaries would also normally have three priests.<sup>8</sup>

This greater particularity does not in itself make the god of cult an intrinsically different being from the god known by name alone; Athena Hippiā, of horses, is one aspect of Athena seen in close-up, not the expression of a different conception of deity. But the system created de facto a certain fragmentation of the divine figure. It was common in oaths for a single god to be several times invoked under different epithets; oracles would very regularly advise cities to add a cult of a god under a new epithet to their existing set of cults of that god; and in a famous episode Xenophon, regular worshipper of Zeus Basileus, was told by a seer that his financial problems were caused by his neglect of Zeus Meilichios.<sup>9</sup> Even if in one perspective Zeus Meilichios was simply one aspect of Zeus, in another he had to be treated as an independent figure. He was often portrayed differently too, as a gigantic snake.<sup>10</sup>

but as one possibility among many. Even within Christianity, monotheism was merely, according to Paul Veyne, a "laborieux point d'honneur de théologiens" (*Quand notre monde est devenu Chrétien* [312-394] [Paris, 2007], 39); he also notes that "Platon, les stoïciens et Plotin sont polythéistes et monistes" (39 n. 2).

7. Cf. H. S. Versnel in *Sacrifice dans l'antiquité*, 171-79.

8. On all this see R. Parker, "The Problem of the Greek Cult Epithet," in *OpAth* 28 (2003): 173-83.

9. Xen. *Anab.* 7.8.1-6, to be contrasted with Xen. *Symp.* 8.9, "Zeus is believed to be one figure yet has many epithets."

10. See A. B. Cook, *Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion* 2.2 (Cambridge 1925), 1160-78 (also citing snake representations of Zeus Philios).

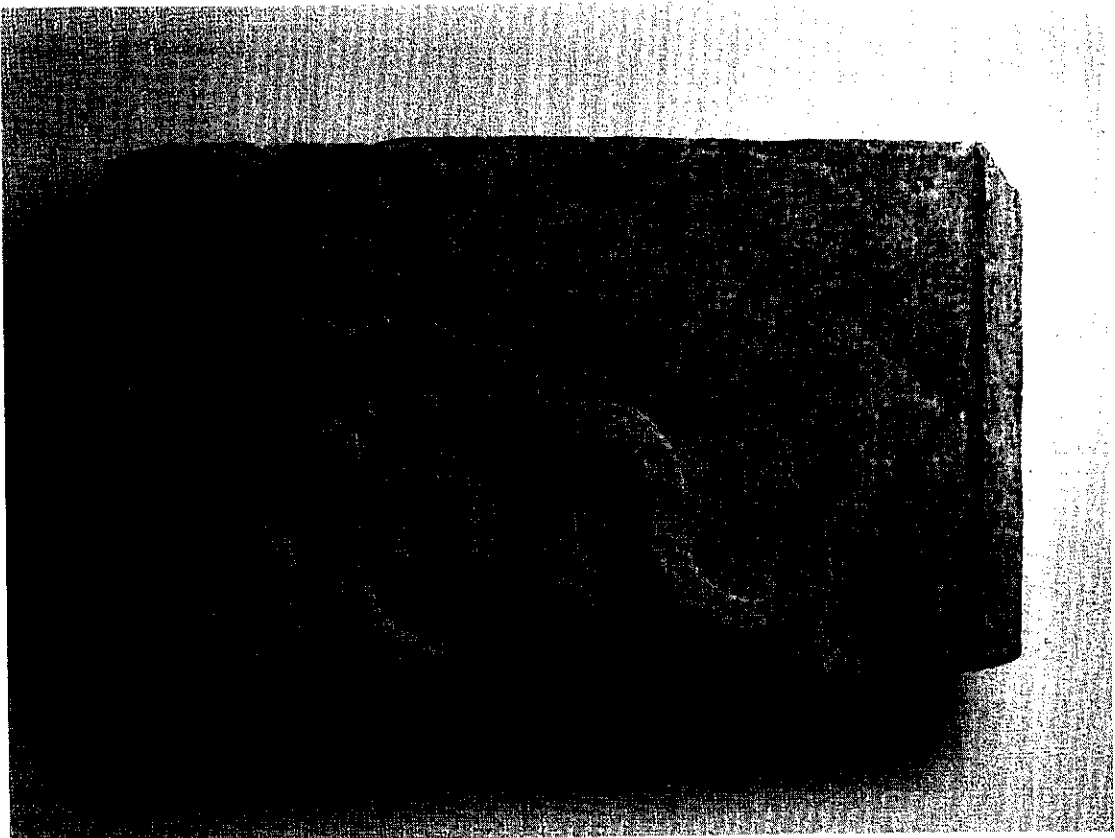


Figure 1. Zeus Melichios as a snake, approached by worshippers. Votive relief, fourth century, Piraeus. Berlin, Staatliche Museen K 91 (inv. SK 723). Photo © bpk / Antikensammlung, SMB / Ingrid Geske.

Some other applications of the system of the cultic double name may seem to stretch the unity of the god almost to breaking point. Herodotus (and other Greeks too) worked on the assumption that the difference between, say, “Zeus” and “Amoun” was no different from that between the Greek and

Egyptian words for “bread”; the god, like the bread, is the same everywhere, and Amoun is not a different god from Zeus but simply the Egyptian word for him. At the level of cult practice these assimilations were commonly accomplished via the cultic double name: the two names could be juxtaposed, as with the Carian Zeus Osoyo, or the foreign god could simply be given a Greek name plus an epithet, whether local as with Zeus Thebaeus (Zeus of Egyptian Thebes, the god we call Amun-Re), or descriptive as with “Heavenly” Aphrodite (generally supposed to represent eastern goddesses such as Astarte).<sup>11</sup> At this point, the cultic double name has ceased, as viewed from outside, to be a way of picking out particular aspects of a single god, and has become an umbrella under which different gods shelter. Extreme cases exist even among figures we commonly think of as Greek. Zeus Melichios is commonly represented on votive reliefs as an enormous snake (though depictions with the standard iconography of Zeus also exist) and received sacrifice of distinctive form;<sup>12</sup> it was probably this singularity that encouraged Xenophon’s seer in the incident mentioned above to treat him as a wholly distinct figure. Ephesian Artemis too had the distinctive iconography that has made her famous (wrongly—the objects shown lack nipples) as “many-breasted.”

The cultic double name allowed juxtapositions not just between a Greek and a non-Greek god’s name but also between a major Greek god and a lesser: Apollo Paion, Artemis Eleithya, Athena Nike. How the Greeks understood such compounds is not always clear, but it is plausible that in many cases the second element was taken as an epithet of the first: Artemis Eleithya is Artemis in her relation to childbirth as Athena Hippia is Athena in her relation to horses. Yet in some parts of the Greek world Eleithya is certainly treated as a freestanding goddess.<sup>13</sup> In literature from the fifth century onward the idea occasionally surfaces that the dividing lines between gods apparently drawn by distinct names may not reflect reality: in *Prometheus Vinctus* (209–10) the hero speaks of his mother as “Gaia and Themis, one form with many names (πολλὰν ὀνομάτων μορφήν μία),” and in poetry

11. Zeus Thebaeus: Hdt. 1.182.2, and often; for a sixth-century Greek dedication to Zeus Thebaeus from Memphis, see L. H. Jeffery, *The Local Scripts of Archaic Greece* (Oxford, 1990), 358, no. 49. Aphrodite Ourania: Pirenne-Delforge, *L’Aphrodite Grecque*, 437–39; Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 196 n. 158. Gods of all nations the same: Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 67, 377E–378A (but foreign religious cults might nonetheless appall: P. Borgeaud in *Nomine religiose*, 73–75). Why some gods resisted assimilation (as, e.g., Bendis failed to become Artemis Bendis or Thracian Artemis) is a good question.

12. Iconography: A. B. Cook, *Zeus* (Cambridge, 1925), 2.1108–10; sacrifice: Xen. *Anab.* 7.8.5. 13. Cf. Parker, “Artemis Ilidye et autres: Le problème du nom divin utilisé comme épithète,” in *Nommes des dieux: Theonymes, épithètes, épicles dans l’antiquité*, ed. N. Belayche et al. (Rennes, 2005), 219–26.

it is quite common to find, say, the myths and attributes of Demeter and Mother<sup>14</sup> or of Dionysus and Iacchus conflated. Cases such as Artemis Eileithya show that such uncertainty about the boundaries of divine figures could also affect cult.

A parallel case in a slightly different way is that of Zeus Chthonios, Zeus of the earth and of the underworld. Is Zeus Chthonios to be understood as "Zeus in his aspect as god of the earth and the underworld," or is he rather "the underworld equivalent to Zeus"? In itself, the use of the epithet suggests the former, but in Aeschylus we hear of "another Zeus" (Ζεὺς ἄλλος) who judges human offenses under the earth.<sup>15</sup> Even to pose the question is perhaps to seek a precision that the Greeks knew to be unattainable. In Pausanias we sometimes encounter the phenomenon of cult addressed to a power whose identity is uncertain even to those who honor it. He registers no fewer than seven opinions as to who or what the Horse-Disturber, Taraxippos, honored at Olympia might be; he notes uncertainty among the Phigaleians whether Eurynome, possessor of a venerable shrine in their territory, is an epithet of Artemis or a daughter of Ocean.<sup>16</sup> The uncertainty can extend to the class of divine being (major god? minor god? hero?) to which the honorand belonged. But Taraxippos and Eurynome continued to receive cult whoever they were.

### The Limited Diversity of Local Pantheons

There is, then, the argument thus far has shown, something illusory about the stability of a cultic calendar with its listing of clearly distinct gods. But at the level of cult practice Greeks accepted that illusion, and doubtless did not worry overmuch about the reality lying behind every name. It is to the world of civic pantheons as revealed in such cult calendars that I now turn. It is a commonplace that no two Greek political communities worshipped exactly the same gods: every city and tribe had its own set of figures that it worshipped collectively, and further differences arose at the level of the subdivisions of cities and tribes and of the private cults carried on within them.

14. The classic case is Eur. *Hel.* 1301–52, where the "Mother of the Gods" is described hunting for her lost daughter like Demeter; see too Pind. *Isth.* 7.3–4, where Demeter receives Mother's symbols. Dionysus and Iacchus see the works cited in Parker, *Polytheism*, 349 n. 95. The author of the probably fifth-century Derveni papyrus identifies (inter alia) Earth, Mother, Rhea, Hera, and Deo: T. Koumenos et al., eds., *The Derveni Papyrus* (Florence, 2006), col. 22, 7–16.

15. Aesch. *Supp.* 231; on the issue see M. L. West's good note on Hes. *Op.* 465.

16. Paus. 6.20.15–19; 8.41.4–5; cf., e.g., Plut. *Cleom.* 9.2–3 on Pasiphae.

How deep these differences went is an open question; we know a certain amount about the cult systems of a large number of Greek communities, but a great deal only about very few, and everything about none at all. The Greeks themselves took local variation for granted, but never thought to suggest that the variations amounted to really radical differences; Herodotus mentions festivals confined to particular regions of the Greek world, but not gods.<sup>17</sup>

Listings of gods make dull reading, but a rough outline sketch is needed, to give a sense of the issue. As a working hypothesis it can be proposed (but not uncontroversially,<sup>18</sup> and certainly not demonstrably) that almost all Greek communities from about 700 onward, and in most cases very likely from much earlier, honored Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Apollo, Artemis, Dionysus, Hermes, Aphrodite, Demeter (probably associated with Persephone/Kore), Heracles, and at a domestic level Hestia. But their prominence, titles, and functions will have varied notably from place to place. The groupings and family relationships among these gods that appear in Panhellenic myth will probably also have been widely accepted. The pairing of Zeus at his oracle at Dodona with Dione, not Hera, is striking, but unusual; what account a Dodonaean would have given of Zeus's relationship with the two goddesses is not known. From the late sixth century, cults dedicated to "the twelve gods" as a group begin to be attested.<sup>19</sup> Such cults had no broader effect on the religious calendar of cities or sacred sites that had them; they continued to worship other gods outside the twelve (an arbitrary number doubtless suggested by the twelve months). And listings of the twelve varied from city to city and even within a single city. But the concept confirms that the Greeks had an implicit notion of a distinction between major and minor gods (not their terms however—they spoke just of "the twelve gods"), and reached a tally of major gods roughly comparable to one that we might operate with.

17. 1.147.2, Apateouria as an Ionian festival; 2.171.3, disappearance of the Thesmophoria from the Peloponnese outside Arcadia.

18. H. A. Shapiro, for instance, suggests, *Art and Cult under the Tyrants in Athens* (Maiden, 1989), 13, that "many cults were probably introduced in Athens only in the course of the sixth century," and such arguments based on the absence of prior attestation are quite common. Total absence of a major figure seems unlikely to me; I would allow, however, that, say, in Sparta Orthia may have stood in for Artemis if she was originally distinct from her (but such a "standing in" would inevitably have quickly led to assimilation). Irene Polinskaya in her forthcoming work on cults of Aegina will argue for a small pantheon.

19. First attested by the altar set up in the agora at Athens by the younger Pisistratus, Thuc. 6.54.6, and also probably going back to the sixth century at Olympia (*Hymn. Hom. Merc.* 128; Pind. *Ol.* 10.49; Herodorus of Heracleia *FGH* 31 F 34a); see C. R. Long, *The Twelve Gods of Greece and Rome* (Leiden, 1987), or in brief K. Dowden in *Companion*, 43–45. Dione: see H. W. Parke, *The Oracles of Zeus* (Oxford, 1967), 69–70; E. Simon in *LMC* s.v. Dione.

At a slightly lower level we can set, as figures by the fifth century very widely though perhaps not universally honored, the Dioscuri, Eileithya, Hecate, and Mother; many regions too, perhaps all regions, paid cult to their local rivers, nymphs, and heroes. Asclepius and Pan rise in the fifth and fourth centuries from very humble beginnings to become honored in most of Greece. Some gods well-known from mythology, by contrast (Leto, Hephaestus, Kronos, Ares, Rheia), receive cult only here and there (Ares probably most widely, but always on a small scale). In a few localities, figures unknown to myth have, in the early period, an importance in cult normally only available to major gods: Aphaia, and Minia and Auxesia, on Aegina; Orthia at Sparta (if we assume that it is as a secondary development that she becomes "Artemis Orthia"); Damie and Auxesia in Epidaurus; Alea in Tegea (if originally distinct from "Athena Alea"); Enodia in Thessaly; the Hypetorean Maidens on Delos. But with the exception of Aphaia (and Orthia), they struggle to survive as independent figures beyond the fifth century. Some figures on the god/hero borderline too (Erechtheus at Athens; Hyacinthus, and Helen and Menelaus, at Sparta) are major powers locally. The gods of Mysteries, finally, are often distinctive and localized: the Kaberoi of Thebes, the "Great Gods" of Samothrace, "Despoina" of Lycosura in Arcadia, the "Great Gods" or "Great Goddesses" of Andania in Messenia.

Important regional differences therefore there were. But we should not conclude that radically divergent local pantheons have been brought into partial and superficial conformity by the superimposition of Panhellenic gods and heroes; or, if they have, the superimposition has been extraordinarily successful. As far as we can tell, in every community (with the possible exception of Aegina) the Panhellenic figures prevail over the local. The distinctive character of each pantheon lies more in the specific weightings and roles assigned to the Panhellenic figures than in exclusively local figures. The story of how the local pantheons emerged would have been a highly instructive one, could it be told. (The attempt to tell it was a false trail much trodden in the early nineteenth century.) But it would certainly not have been a simple story of the particular yielding to the general. Widely shared elements, the great gods of myth, were evidently a part of it from a very early time.

But a doubt arises. The names of the Panhellenic deities, it can be agreed, were widely diffused from an early time, but it need not follow that the essence underlying the name was the same in every case. The skeptical position has two forms. According to one, the "same" god, that is, one bearing the same name, may have developed in notably different ways in different localities in response to the differing needs of the local worshipping group; in the Dark Ages, in particular, there were no Panhellenic sanctuaries and perhaps

no universally circulating epic poetry to create a pressure toward conformity.<sup>20</sup> According to the other, the familiar names will sometimes have been imposed on unfamiliar natures, natures which will not, however, have surrendered their individuality, or not totally, merely through acquiring a new name. The unfamiliar nature might be that of an indigenous deity (in the colonial situation), of a foreign god whose worship entered the Greek world, of a perhaps anonymous local deity, or of an archaic type of deity (typically, the goddess of very wide powers) not recognized within the standard Panhellenic model.<sup>21</sup> We can call these the "local divergence" and the "foreign/hellenic substrate" positions.

The question with local divergences is not whether they occurred, as they certainly did, but how often and on what scale; that issue will recur in chapter 7. As for the foreign/archaic substrate, it has doubtless been too often appealed to in colonial situations where no independent evidence exists for the indigenous cults that would supposedly have exerted pressure on the Greek.<sup>22</sup> We will see below that the archaic goddess of comprehensive powers is a figure to be viewed with suspicion. Nonetheless, it is a recognized truth that Greeks imposed familiar names on unfamiliar gods: Artemis Ephesia and Zeus Thebaeus were mentioned above, and innumerable Zeuses and Apollos and Areses of the interior of Asia Minor in the Hellenistic and Roman period are shown by their iconography to differ from the ordinary Olympians. Every postulate of a substrate must be assessed with great skepticism, but the possibility cannot be imperiously denied.

### Natural Forces and Deified Abstractions

The differences not just in power but in nature between different gods have already been hinted at. The comparative mythologists of the second half of the nineteenth century expended extraordinary energy and learning on the attempt to reduce, or, as they thought, elevate, the Greek gods to natural forces or phenomena: Zeus was the sky, Hermes the winds, Athena

20. So C. Sourvinou-Inwood, *JHS* 98 (1978): 101–3 (= "Reading" *Greek Culture*, 147–51).

21. For the last see, e.g., M. Giannulio, *Richerche su Contona arcadia* (Pisa, 1989), 54–79, who sees a common template underlying certain cults of Hera and certain cults of Artemis, Athena, and Aphrodite; Hinz, *Demeter auf Sizilien*, 206, 215, 234; M. B. Hatzopoulos, "Artemis Digia Blaginitis en Macédoine," *BCH* 111 (1987): 397–412 (with further references in *Ludwigiana*, 29 n. 9), who postulates a pre-Hellenic Great Mother underlying a great variety of goddess cults in western Macedonia (ancient territory of the Brygion/Phrygians).

22. See the critics adduced by Sourvinou-Inwood, "Reading" *Greek Culture*, 181 n. 2; cf. the cautious formulations of Chiekoza, *Pontus gaulle*, 289–93, and p. 244 below on the Euxine Achilles.

the rosy bloom of the sky before dawn, and so on. Early man worshipped nature, they thought, because the majesty of nature brought him closer than anything else to an experience of the absolute. We smile now at their efforts, and have done ever since L. R. Farnell observed that they reduced Greek mythology to "highly figurative conversation about the weather."<sup>23</sup> But it is in fact the case that Greeks paid cult to such natural forces as rivers and winds, not heavily disguised as mythological deities but under their own names.

The easter case is that of the winds. Aristophanes mentions sacrificing a black lamb when a typhoon is brewing. Pausanias expresses his amazement at the method used by the men of Methana against the wind Lips when it blows from the Saronic Gulf and withers their vines. Two men cut in half an all-white cock and, holding one half each, run in opposite directions around the vines; when they get back to their starting point, they bury the remains. (Similar methods were employed against hail at Kleonai in the Argolid.) The Athenians built a shrine to the North Wind because in 480 he answered their prayer and wrecked the Persian fleet when anchored off Thermopylae. Regular annual rites, where attested, are likely to have been performed at times of year when destructive winds were a particular threat (or in commemoration of a saving intervention such as that of 480).<sup>24</sup> The cult of the winds represents a rare case of religion operating in the way that J. G. Frazer supposed primitive religion always to operate, as a mechanism intended to control the environment. One sacrificed or prayed to the winds to stop them blowing, or occasionally, in a military context, to cause them to blow destructively against an enemy. (Or where they had contributed to a great military victory, one used them as a peg on which to hang a celebratory cult.) When there was no need to calm the winds or raise them, one ignored them. In the main, it does indeed seem to have been as simple as that.<sup>25</sup>

23. *Culte of the Greek States* (Oxford, 1896), 1.9; cf. Konaris, "Greek Gods," 104-30.

24. Ar. Ran. 847-48 (cf. Xen. Anab. 4.5.4); Paus. 2.34.2; Hdt. 7.189; cf. Stengel, *Opferbräute*, 146-53; Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 156 n. 14. Kleonai: "When the hail-wardens signaled the approach of hail, each man on his account would sacrifice one a lamb, one a hen... anyone who had no lamb or hen pierced his finger with a stylus and performed the rite with this blood" (Seneca QNat 4.6). Annual rites: Paus. 2.12.1 (Sikyon, explicitly said to be intended to calm the winds); Paus. 8.29.2 (offerings to "thunder, lightning, and gales"); LSCG 52.19-20; commemorative cults: Hdt. 7.178, 189; Delphi and Athens: Paus. 8.27.14, 8.36.6, Megalopolis: Ael. VH 12.61, Thuri.

25. A mild complication (discussed by Stengel, *Opferbräute*) is that of the forms of offering. The ad hoc sacrifices to winds were non-participatory slaughter-sacrifices; commemorative sacrifices are likely to have been participatory; annual non-commemorative sacrifices perhaps varied between the two forms.

Rivers are quite different. It may be that no river received a major state cult,<sup>26</sup> but lesser honors are quite widely attested, and Zeus's oracle at Dodona often advised consultants to make offerings to Achelous, the great stream of northwest Greece that came to be treated as the river and river god par excellence. Some rivers had precincts with altars and even small temples, but offerings could also be thrown direct into their waters, in a single rite on Mykonos Achelous received three lambs on the altar and three "in the stream."<sup>27</sup>

I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river  
Is a strong brown god—sullen, untamed and intractable,

Keeping his seasons and rages, destroyer, reminder

Of what men choose to forget. Unhonoured, unpropitiated

By worshippers of the machine, but waiting, watching and waiting.

So writes T. S. Eliot in *Four Quartets*. The standard depiction of rivers as a bull or a man-headed bull or a horned man is doubtless a recognition of their strength. But they were not for the Greeks, unlike winds, the grim and dangerous powers that Eliot imagines. The many votive reliefs to Pan and the Nymphs that contain a head of Achelous do indeed associate him with the powers of wild nature, but wild nature in its cheerful, sportive aspect.<sup>28</sup> And what rivers embodied for the Greeks in cultic terms was the fructifying power of moisture, the source of life itself. In myth rivers often sired human offspring; in cult, one prayed to rivers for offspring and named the child born in answer to the prayer as a "gift" of the river in question. Cephisodorus as it might be. Cephisus had a sanctuary at Phaleron in which he was accompanied by a string of further deities all associated with childbirth and child rearing in some way; one dedication there was made by a Cephisodotus.

26. Depictions of river gods on the coins of various cities of Magna Graecia are sometimes taken to show that they had a "city-protecting" role in these cities (so, e.g., C. Weiss, *Griechische Flussgottheiten in northellenistischer Zeit* [Würzburg, 1984], 21-22). But a river could symbolize a city on coins, particularly, as was regularly the case in Sicily (Strabo 6.1.12, C 262; Douris FGrH 76 F 59), when the city was named from the river (so, e.g., Gela, Akragas, Selinus), without necessarily enjoying like prominence in cult. On river gods, see Nilsson, *Geschichte*, 236-40. Dodona: Ephorus FGrH 70 F 20; on the cult of Achelous see especially E. T. Hom. II 24.616b, mentioning cult performed by Athenians, "Didymoi," Siketios, and Rhodians (games are also attested in Metapontum by a stater, LIMC s.v. Achelous no. 75, N. K. Rutter, *Historia Numorum* [Italy], London 2001, no. 1491).

27. LSCG 96.34-37; cf. p. 146 n. 85.

28. See C. Edwards, "Greek Votive Reliefs to Pan and the Nymphs" (PhD diss., New York University, 1985). Ael. VH 2.33 gives a useful overview of the various iconographic possibilities for depicting river gods.

As the child grew up it retained an association with its patronal river, and might consecrate to it a lock of adolescent hair; the river Parnisos in Messenia cured children's diseases. Other cultic roles of rivers seem minor by comparison.<sup>29</sup>

Earth, too, was worshipped, on a modest scale, as the place of growth (she typically received pregnant victims as sacrificial offerings) and as a "nurturer of children" (*kourtophos*).<sup>30</sup> Nymphs straddle the natural and the social. They are regularly intimately associated with features of the natural world, springs above all, and with particular places; they populate the landscape, one might say. Three illustrations from cult: a sacred law from Attica publishes the rule, endorsed by the oracle of Delphi itself, that anyone drinking from the spring Halikos should pay an annual fee of an obol (a very modest sum) to the nymphs "for rites"; another such law from the Asklepion at Cos requires offerings for the nymphs to be sacrificed on the altars and forbids, what was evidently a temptation, the throwing of cakes into "the springs in the shrine"; one of the points at which the sacred Milesian college of the Molpoi stop to sing a paean during their procession to Didyma is "at (the) meadow (at Meadow?) on the height by the nymphs."<sup>31</sup> The very frequent "caves of the nymphs" are a different aspect of their embeddedness in the natural world. But a single spring is often inhabited not just by one nymph but by a cluster, so that a simple equivalence between natural phenomenon and deity such as is found with rivers does not apply. Such nymphs are depicted simply as young women, with nothing liquid about them, and "nymph" (*νύμφη*) is the ordinary Greek word for "bride"; a shrine of "Nymph" (singular—a rarity) below the acropolis in Athens has yielded a richer collection of offerings associated with marriage than has any other.<sup>32</sup> There is, it is true, a symbolic link between springs and marriage through the much-stressed ritual of the bridal bath, as also through the fructifying and child-nurturing force of water mentioned earlier. But nymphs escape narrow confinement within particular physical spheres in many other ways, in their regular association in cult with "Apollo leader of the Nymphs," for instance.

29. Fructifying moisture: e.g., Σ Pind. *Pyth.* 4.145. Shrine at Phaleron: Parker, *Polytheism*, 430–31. Parnisos: Paus. 4.31.4, confirmed by excavated votives; N. Valmin, *The Swedish Messenia Expedition* (Lund, 1938), 419–65. Hair: Hom. *Il.* 23.141–49 (where vows to a river on behalf of a son also appear); Aesch. *Cho.* 6. Other cultic roles: e.g., armies might make offerings to rivers that they encountered.

30. See, e.g., Parker, *Polytheism*, 416, 427.

31. LSCG 178; *ibid.* 152; LSA 50.29. On nymphs see H. Herter, *RE* s.v. Nymphaei; J. Larson, *Greek Nymphs* (Oxford, 2001).

32. J. Travlos, *Patronal Dictionary of Ancient Athens* (London, 1971), 361–64; C. Papadopoulou-Kanellopoulou, *Iero tis Nymphi: Melanomorfis Ioutraphoi* (Athens, 1997).

Like the nymphs, many major gods could be manifested through and as natural forces, though not as them alone. "Zeus rains," "the god rains," and "it rains" are interchangeable forms of expression, and Zeus both huris and is the thunderbolt, "Thundering Zeus" or "Zeus Thunderbolt" or "Zeus who comes down" (Zeus Katabates)<sup>33</sup> (and many other such titles); as "the cloud-gatherer" he perches on the peak of most major Greek mountains. The line between the god as the cause of a natural phenomenon and as the natural phenomenon itself is a fine one doubtless not worth agonizing over. Poseidon, strictly speaking, is perhaps the cause of storms at sea, not the storm itself, but, were there a single physical manifestation of the storm analogous to the lightning bolt, Poseidon would also be that (just as St. Elmo's fire, the electrical manifestation taken as a good omen by storm-pressed sailors, was a form of the Dioscuri); he also caused earthquakes.

Other gods have a non-personal substratum of different type: when the sophist Prodicus announced that Demeter was grain and Dionysus wine,<sup>34</sup> he was only giving one-sided expression to a general perception (but Demeter was also identified with earth), while several terms in common use for sexual intercourse derive directly from the name Aphrodite. On the other hand, the association of Apollo and Artemis with natural phenomena is secondary (if we disallow their early roles as senders of, respectively, plague and death in childhood), and Hermes, Athena, and Hera have none. The identifications of Apollo with the sun and Artemis with the moon that begin in the fifth century can be taken, at most, as indicating a potentiality inherent in the Greek conception of deity, a shape into which a god could be molded. Conversely, sun and moon received no significant worship in early Greece.<sup>35</sup>

So much for the divine as manifested in the world of nature. But these physically based gods consorted cheerfully with others whom we would describe—it is, however, important that the description is ours, not theirs—as personifications of abstract qualities or ideas. Greek art and literature (starting

33. Cf. p. 4 n. 5. On mountain Zeuses, see M. Langdon, *A Sanctuary of Zeus on Mount Hymettos* (*Hesperia* suppl. 16, Princeton, 1976).

34. DK 84 B 5. The reduction of gods to physical substances or phenomena is criticized as impious in Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 66–7; 377D–F to "experiences and capacities and powers" (*τάδε καὶ δύναμεις καὶ δυνάμεις*) in Plut. *Amat.* 13–14, 757B–C. I merely note the occasional instances where objects are said to be worshipped: Plut. *Quaest. Graec.* 13, 294C (a stone, among the Aeginetes); Paus. 9.40.11–12 (the scepter, called Spear, of Agamemnon, at Chlaireneia; Schachter, *Calls*, 1:199); cf. Nock, *Essays*, 242.

35. See in brief the articles Helios and Selene in *OCD*. The cult of winds and rivers was certainly already strong in Homeric times (*Il.* 23.141–49, 193–95), and that of winds in Linear B (tablets KN 200 and 202). So no simple pattern reveals itself. And on one island, Rhodes, Helios was already prominent by the fifth century (*SEG* 27.481), and perhaps much earlier. A full study would need to consider much else, e.g., gods of the sea.

with Hesiod's *Theogony*) is full, not just of rivers and sea nymphs and so on, but also of groups such as Graces and Seasons and Destinies and individuals such as Love (Eros), Persuasion, Fair Fame, Peace, Strife, Fear, Blind Madness, Rumor, and many others. Substantial numbers of these figures acquired some role in cult, if usually in a small way, and though positive (Health, Peace, Concord) or neutral (Persuasion) qualities were normally chosen, the admiral of Philip V who established altars to Impiety and Lawlessness wherever he landed was working within the idiom; the list of such cults that can be established for Sparta, apparently a special case, includes Death, Laughter, and Hunger.<sup>36</sup>

A few quotations may help to illuminate the world of thought. Hesiod writes that "no rumor ever perishes that many men speak; she too is a goddess"; Themistocles sought to extort money from the Andrians, backed by what he called "two great gods, Persuasion and Compulsion," but was told that, since two useless gods never left their island, Poverty and Helplessness, they could not pay; while expressions such as "to recognize one's friends is a god" or "if you are moved by shame, you will achieve nothing: that goddess is ineffectual" are quite common in tragedy. All the forces that are powerful within human life are in a sense divine; in Wilamowitz's famous formula, "god" is a predicate, a special power recognized in certain phenomena.<sup>37</sup>

In cult, the personifications tend to be tucked in with major deities, Persuasion, for instance, with Aphrodite or Health with Asclepius or Virtue (Arete) with Heracles, just as in poetry and genealogy they are often born of a major god or appear in his or her train. They thus extend or clarify the scope of a major divine figure, in a way somewhat comparable to the cult epithet system; sometimes they become epithets, as in Athena Victory or Aphrodite Persuasion. But figures such as the Graces and Eros can stand on their own; they are indeed such familiar components of Greek cult that we tend to forget that they are abstractions no less than is, say, the goddess Democracy. And the cult of Nemesis at Rhamnus in Attica is a remarkable example of a major freestanding cult of an abstract quality, "Righteous Anger/Indignation"; Themis, "Divinely Sanctioned Order," may have had

36. Admiral Polyb. 18.54.10; Sparta: N. Richter in *Companion*, 248.

37. Hes. *Op.* 763-64; Hdt. 8.111.2; Eur. *Hél.* 560 (cf. R. Kannich's note ad loc.); Eur. *Ion* 337. Wilamowitz's formula: *Glauke* 1. 17; cf. S. R. F. Price, *JHS* 104 (1984): 79-95; P. Veyne, *Antiquités* (2000): 30: "Tout ce qui rompt avec la quotidienneté, tout ce qui était manquant, y compris les sources, les monts et les rois, prêtait une forme religieuse. Car le sacré n'est pas une essence, mais une forme."

similar prominence in Thessaly. The goddesses known as "Reverend Ones" (Semnai) or "Kindly Ones" (Euménides) are familiar as guardians of the moral order; to worship Nemesis or Themis was probably somewhat like worshipping them.<sup>38</sup>

Nobody denies that Greeks paid cult to rivers, winds, and Love. The tendency, however, is to acknowledge such phenomena rather briefly, and pass on to the major Olympians. But any attempt to analyze Greek conceptions of deity must take serious account of them. Their role in cult may be modest, but for analytical purposes what matters is that they can receive cult at all. Also relevant is the cult paid to living mortals, a phenomenon first attested in the fifth century though becoming much commoner in the time of the Hellenistic monarchs, its typical beneficiaries. Three positions are here available: that the phenomenon is a symptom of change/decline/a new "épistème," or however one chooses to describe it, and can thus be set aside; that the "godlike" honors paid to mortals were always perceived as distinct from the honors paid to actual gods, and can again be bracketed off for that reason; and finally that an extension to include living mortals was a potentiality present in the Greek conception of deity and must be reckoned with in any attempt to describe that conception.

I postpone discussion of the complicated problem to an appendix,<sup>39</sup> but in brief it can be said that, whereas position one (change and decline) is today largely discredited, the other two both capture aspects of the phenomenon. On the one hand, nobody was unaware that monarchs were doomed to death and thus radically different in nature from the immortal gods; when they received godlike honors, the traditional association between deity and immortality was bracketed off, not forgotten. On the other hand, the benefits in virtue of which they received those honors, such as the rescue of a city in time of acute danger, were exactly those for which gods also were traditionally thanked and honored. The relevant criterion is what the "god" does, not what he is. So ruler cult reveals the crucial importance of effective power within the Greek understanding of deity. A king is treated as a god not because of what he is (he is in fact a mortal) but because of what he can do.

38. On the worship of "abstractions," see Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 228-37 [+]; E. Stafford, *Worshipping Virtues: Personification and the Divine in Ancient Greece* (London, 2000); on Nemesis, Parker, *Polytheism*, 406-7; on Themis, Stafford, 2000, chap. 2; Rudhardt, *Thémis*. Heracles and Arete: *Ilythiai* 207 (LSA 26) 9.

39. See appendix 3.

## Olympians and Chthonians

We are almost ready to tackle the individual Olympians. But first the controversial topic of "chthonian gods" must be broached.<sup>40</sup> What is at issue is the whole shape of the divine world as seen by the Greeks. On one view the distinction between Olympians, gods of the bright sky, and chthonians, gods of the earth, constitutes a central division within the pantheon, expressed and made vivid above all by the different sacrificial rituals applied to the two groups. Individual gods straddle the divide, it is allowed, without diminishing its importance. On the other view, the distinction is simply one among several that Greeks draw from time to time within the pantheon, and the various divergences from standard sacrificial procedure that exist should not be brought together within a single class of "chthonian sacrifice." (On either view, the division is an unequal one, Olympians far outnumbering chthonians.)

The orator Isocrates draws a distinction between "the gods called Olympian," whom we approach in search of blessings, and "gods who bear less attractive names," who are honored only in order to turn them away.<sup>41</sup> Isocrates, no one denies, exaggerates to make a particular rhetorical point that has nothing to do with religion (he is urging mildness on King Philip); Greek religion was not dualist, and all gods were potentially sources of harm as well as of benefit, of benefit as well as of harm. The question is how gross is his distortion. Some categories of divine being were certainly treated with more elaborate displays of nervous respect than others. The chorus in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* speak of the Eumenides as the goddesses whom "we tremble to name and we pass by without looking, without utterance, without words." That is very different from the chorus in Euripides' *Ion* hailing Athena as "my goddess."<sup>42</sup> But are the Eumenides as represented by Sophocles representative of a broader class of "chthonians"?

First some points that are not in dispute. The adjective *chthonios*, of the earth, or closely comparable expressions, are from time to time applied to the

40. Pro the importance of the Olympian/chthonian distinction, see above all Scullion, "Olympian and Chthonian", contra, R. Schliester, article "Chthonian Gods," in *Brill's New Pauly* [?+] (note especially Nock, *Essays*, 592, 595). See too now A. Henrichs in *Greek Sacred Ritual*, 47-60.

41. Isoc. 5 (*Philippos*) 117: "In the case of gods too I observe that those who bring men blessings are called Olympian, while those responsible for calamities and punishment have less pleasant names; private individuals and cities have founded temples and altars of the one group, while the other is honored neither in sacrifices nor in prayers, but we perform rites of expulsion (*atrochismos*) against them"; cf. Sourvinou-Inwood, *Hylas*, 163-64. Note too Hippoc. *Vita*. 4.89 [Jones, last sentence: after well-omened dreams, pray to Sun, Zeus of the Heavens, Zeus of Property (Ktesios), Athena of Property, Hermes, Apollo; after ill-omened dreams, to "the gods of aversion, Earth, and heroes." But in 4.90 (line 63 Jones) one should pray after dreaming of the earth to Earth, Hermes, and heroes.

42. Soph. OC 129-31; Eur. Ion 211.

following classes of being, and sometimes to more than one simultaneously: (1) the ordinary dead; (2) the powerful dead, the heroes;<sup>43</sup> (3) gods associated with the underworld such as Persephone, Hades/Plouton, Hecate, Hermes, and groups such as the Erinyes/Eumenides/Semnai; (4) the gods of agriculture, Earth, Demeter, and (in one of his aspects) Zeus. When applied to Demeter and Zeus, the epithet "earthly" may primarily indicate not a place of residence but a sphere of activity, agriculture. Even so, the fact that Olympians though they are (so too is Hermes), they can receive the chthonian epithet, proves that the division between the two classes is not an absolute one. Even on a strong view of the importance of the divide, the divine world does not fall apart into two unconnected halves; Persephone, queen of the underworld, is daughter of the king of heaven (her husband is his brother), and according to the myth she commutes between the two spheres.

One context where certain chthonians come vividly into view is that of curse tablets.<sup>44</sup> Such tablets are deposited in graves or other points of access to the underworld and call on underworld powers to "bind" their targets. The powers invoked (often explicitly addressed as "chthonians") are broadly those of group (3) above, Hermes and Persephone above all; those of group (4) are absent, with the unsurprising exception of Earth herself. In this context, then, groups (3) and (4) split apart from one another. There is nonetheless a conceptual link between groups (1) to (3) and group (4) in that the dead and the underworld powers have influence over agricultural growth. Persephone, goddess of the underworld, is daughter of Demeter, goddess of corn, and Zeus Chthonios, the farmer's friend, can scarcely be dissociated from that Zeus Katachthonios whom Homer represents as ruling alongside Persephone. Even if the conception of plants coming "from the dead" is only attested once, the dead are regularly invoked to "send up good things"; Plouton bestows wealth, agricultural wealth above all; powers such as the Semnai, when duly appeased, promote the growth of plants or at least refrain from blighting it, and a powerful if vague symbolic association surely existed between the periodic return of Persephone from the underworld and the emergence of the corn.<sup>45</sup> (But the connection is not invariable: Hecate and Hermes have close links with the underworld but none with agriculture.)

43. See Scullion, "Olympian and Chthonian," 93 n. 43.

44. For an introduction, see D. Ogden in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. V. Flint et al., 1-90 (London, 1999); cf. pp. 259-61.

45. Zeus Chthonios agricultural: Hes. *Op.* 465, LSCG 96.25. Zeus Katachthonios: Hom. *Il.* 9.457, "From the dead"; Hippoc. *Vita*. 4.92, "send up good things"; Ar. fr. 504.14 with K/A's note ad loc.; Persephone and the corn: Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 259-61.



FIGURE 2. Enclosure of a "chthonian," probably a hero, in the Athenian agora: offerings—small pots, lamps, loom weights—were placed on the ground around an outcrop of living rock. Photo American School of Classical Studies at Athens: Agora Excavations.

Thus far we have been on firm ground. The classes of chthonians that we have looked at are so spoken of by good sources; and the double aspect of earth, as home of the dead and the source of growth, is well established; so too that those two aspects to some extent blend into one another. We can note too the practice sometimes found of simply depositing offerings for Demeter and Persephone in the earth.<sup>46</sup> The controversial question is partly whether Zeus under the title *Meilichios* (say) is a chthonian though not so described; partly whether the mixed status of Zeus, Hermes, Demeter, and Persephone, as powers part Olympian, part chthonian, is shared by further gods too. The older literature is so full of claims that this or that god "has a chthonian aspect" that one is left with few if any pure Olympians.<sup>47</sup> What the vague concept of a "chthonian aspect" may amount to can be focused as the proposition that a given god who is Olympian when worshipped under

cult titles A, B, and C, is chthonian under titles Y and Z. What is at issue, or what should be, is not labeling for labeling's sake but a hypothesis about the perceived powers of the god in question as worshipped under a particular epithet: the claim that Zeus *Meilichios*, say, or Zeus *Poleus* is a chthonian is a claim that Greeks worshipped him under those titles with a view to securing his aid in making the crops grow (or some related goal).

The case for applying the chthonian label to deities not explicitly so described can occasionally seek iconographic support: Zeus, for instance, under certain aspects can be depicted as a snake, creature of the earth.<sup>48</sup> But it is based primarily on sacrificial ritual. It used to be believed, on the basis of certain schematic claims in late sources, that there existed a distinctive form of sacrifice, systematically different from that made to the gods above and universally employed, with a few rare exceptions, for offerings to the chthonians; this distinctive mode of chthonian sacrifice was the chief guarantee that the chthonians did indeed possess significant unity as a class, and a deity that received the distinctive form was thereby shown to be a chthonian even if not so described. Epigraphic discoveries have refuted that conception and it need be discussed no further.<sup>49</sup> It is also now agreed that no Greek word or group of words exists meaning "to sacrifice to the chthonians." Instead we are faced with a series of divergences from the standard type of sacrifice, which may occur singly or in combination; we learn more of these divergences, the ground shifts, whenever a calendar that gives more than a minimum of ritual detail is published.<sup>50</sup> More meat may be burnt than the portion traditionally assigned to the gods, whether the whole animal (*holocaust*) or, much more rarely, a fraction (e.g., a ninth part) (*moirocaust*). Libations of mixed wine may be forbidden, in favor of unmixed wine or "sober" wineless libations (an exquisite variant is "sober as far as the entrails," i.e., the character of the libations was altered during the ceremony). The blood of the victim may be poured not onto the altar but into the earth. A victim of particular type (black, or pregnant) may be required. There may be an explicit rule that the meat of the animal must be consumed "on the spot," not carried away to be eaten at leisure in the house. Other variations (type of altar used, time of day, direction in which the sacrificer faces) are attested in late sources but are

48. See n. 10 above.

49. See Ekroth, *Sacrificial Rituals*, passim, building on the classic study of A. D. Nock, "The Cult of Heroes," in *Essays* 575–602 (from *HTHR* 37 [1944]: 141–74). On the linguistic point, Ekroth shows that *ἐνεργέειν* is never used of sacrifice to a god (but only to the dead or to heroes), and so cannot cover a field of "chthonian sacrifice."

50. A text from Akxone in Attica first published in 2004 brought important new evidence, for instance: see p. 144 n. 81.

46. Hinz, *Demeter auf Sizilien*, 53.

47. As was complained by A. Fairbanks in a pioneering critique, *AJP* 21 (1900): 241–59.

usually not of a nature to find confirmation, or refutation, in the epigraphic record.<sup>51</sup>

Chthonian sacrifice as a single type has vanished. A spirited case has, however, been made for replacing it with a cluster of types of chthonian sacrifice. The issues involved are complex and technical, and I postpone discussion of them too to an appendix.<sup>52</sup> My conclusion is that there is little profit in applying the label "chthonian" where the ancients did not. The divergences from standard sacrificial forms will always have had a meaning, even if one we are often unable to recover. But those divergences obey a more complicated or more fragmented logic than even a sophisticated elaboration of the chthonian/Olympian opposition can capture.

### The Different "Honors" of Gods: The Structuralist Approach

I revert to the great gods. How is one to analyze a major Greek god? One or two ancient theories that still, undetected as such, occasionally exercise an influence must first be pulled out into the light of day to give an account of themselves. K. O. Müller early in the nineteenth century argued the case for "tribal gods," and E. Curtius near its end introduced the still influential concept of "total goddesses."<sup>53</sup> In Müller's conception the Greek pantheon that we know emerged by combination of the gods of the different Greek tribes; they became, therefore, true polytheists only by chance, since originally the great god of an individual tribe, such as the Apollo of the Dorians, would have exercised almost universal powers. Curtius argued that

51. On all this, see pp. 144–150 below.

52. See appendix 4.

53. See Konars, "Greek Gods," 133–34, 136–37 (K. O. Müller); 178–79 (Curtius). Lucian's Zeus claims to have been a "total god" until rivals eroded his powers (*Ikonempepos*, 24). We do not, of course, need to believe him. In the paterfamilias to Hecate contained in Hesiod's *Theogony*, comprehensive powers are claimed for the goddess (411–52)—she grants wealth, and assists in judicial affairs, politics, war, sport, horsemanship, seafaring, stock rearing, and child nurture. But the poet stresses that some of these functions are shared with the more obvious patrons (stock rearing with Hermes, aid at sea with Poseidon) and that she is much esteemed by Zeus and all the gods; her activities are known and accepted, therefore. No other evidence suggests such a panoply of powers for Hecate, and the paterfamilias remains an intriguing and unexplained anomaly (one that illustrates, one must concede, a thought experiment that was possible within polytheism). The speech of Teiresias in Euripides' *Bacchae* (298–313) in which, for promotional purposes, he seeks to broaden the scope of Dionysus's powers works very differently; he explains the two extensions (into the spheres of prophecy and warfare) in terms of Dionysus's core mode of activity, "madness." So too claims for the universal power of Aphrodite (*Hymn. Hom. Ven.* 1–6; Eur. *Hipp.* 447–50) all relate to the ubiquity of sexual desire.

the Greek goddesses emerged by differentiation, a differentiation, however, only imperfectly accomplished, within a single universal goddess, that oriental "Great Mother" still so prominent in New Age, and in some branches of feminist mythology.<sup>54</sup> Curtius, it should be noted, was not a spinner of orientalist fantasies but an archaeologist faced with the difficulty of distinguishing one goddess from another amid the figurines emerging in such abundance from excavations both in Greece and the Near East; and it is to his credit that he was willing to envisage Athena and the rest emerging from "Semitic" models. The details of the positions here crudely sketched need not concern us. What matters is the implication common to both that many Greek gods may still retain traces of an original almost universal competence; anything is possible, and even Athena, say, may be a "mother" or be able to promote the fertility of the fields.

Such assumptions run absolutely contrary to all that the Greeks say about their own pantheon. From Homer down to the *Hymns* of Callimachus and beyond, innumerable texts attest the idea of a division between the gods, and in the *Theogony* and the Homeric Hymns we are often shown such divisions taking place; in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* we see a division that is explicitly differential, as the functions of Hermes and Apollo are clearly demarcated one from another. What is divided is not quite constant. In Homer we find divisions of space—Zeus has heaven as his portion, Poseidon the sea, Hades the underworld, while earth is shared—and also of function—Aphrodite, for instance, is told that "the works of war" have not been granted to her—but in texts in general the dominant idiom is the imprecise one of "honors."<sup>55</sup> Perhaps there was also a sense in which any god was additionally an undifferentiated fragment of "the divine" and could in extremis be appealed to in any human need. But regular cult should have respected the notion of a division of functions (not necessarily the same in every community). As for heroes, they fall outside this frame of reference; they had no share in the division but certainly had powers, which were not, however, seen as in competition with those of gods. The working assumption ought to be that all Greeks had some notion of the divine world being structured by a division of "honors" between the gods. Exceptions, supposed manifestations

54. For a critique, see L. Goodison and C. Morris, eds., *Ancient Goddesses: The Myths and the Evidence* (London, 1998).

55. Hom. *Il.* 15.187–93; 5.428. "Honors": e.g., Hes. *Theog.* 74, 112, 203–6, 885; Hdt. 2.53 "honors and skills" (τιμὰι καὶ τέχναι); there is minute division of functions still, e.g., in Plut. *Amat.* 14–16, 757D–758D. Cf. Rudhardt, *Mythe, religion*, 227–33, "La répartition des τιμὰι, articulation centrale des systèmes mythiques grecs."

of the power of total gods or goddesses, need to be demonstrated rigorously, not allowed by default on the basis of ambiguous evidence.<sup>56</sup>

In the Greek conception, therefore, individual gods had a portfolio of exclusive functions. But the texts do not state or imply that the functions within such a portfolio have any organizing center; they are presented as a series of separate competences. There is therefore no objection from texts to what one might call the snowball theory of the Greek gods, the idea that as a god rolls down through history it picks up new functions and powers that need not cohere with its original nature or with one another: rather like a multinational company that starts out selling records and ends up running an airline. This assumption is occasionally stated explicitly within scholarship, more often (like so many others in the study of Greek deity) merely acted on. On the other hand, standard handbooks often try in greater or lesser degree to give a unifying account of a particular god's functions: the question of the unity of the divine remains a central and open one.<sup>57</sup>

One complication to what has been said about division of honors must be allowed. Though this was one way in which Greeks regularly spoke about the interrelationships of their gods, they also often spoke in terms of the especial love of particular gods for particular cities. The correlate was that a particular god (or more usually goddess) often had a prominence in the cults of a particular city apparently out of scale with its place in an ordered division of honors. Greeks did not attempt to reconcile the two ways of speaking about the gods; they deployed them separately in different contexts. The role of "chief god" or "special god" was not acknowledged explicitly, other than through the language of a god's love for a place, and there is no epithet that indicates it; chief gods are often called "of the city" (Polias) or "protector of

56. What do I say, it may be asked, about the pregnant animals twice offered (p. 286 n. 9 below) to Athena? They constitute, I concede, good evidence for Athena exercising a quite unfamiliar function. I can merely plead that they are too exceptional to be treated as vestiges of an original much broader competence.

57. W. E. Otto was responsible for some notable unifying analyses in *Die Götter Griechenlands* (Bonn, 1929; trans. M. Hadas as *The Homeric Gods*, New York, 1954). On the other side, see, e.g., C. J. Herington, *JHS* 89 (1969): 168–70 (criticizing the opposite approach of L. Séchan and P. Lévêque, *Les grandes divinités de la Grèce* [Paris, 1966]); Mikalson, *Athenian Popular Religion*, 72; E. Graf, *Apollo* (London, 2009), 5: "In mapping the provinces of Apollo's activities, I will not even try to find a unity that would underlie the different roles; the Aristotelian enterprise to reduce multiplicity to one single origin never convinced me when dealing with Greek gods." Cf. U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Greek Historical Writing and Apollo* (Oxford, 1908), 45: "For too long a time Science was seeking for a formula which should express the whole being of the god... The gods, too, have their history, inasmuch as they live only in men's emotions, with those emotions they shift and change... We have to understand not one Apollo, but many and diverse Apollos, living and changing in the ritual and belief of diverse places and periods."

the city" (Polionchos), but not invariably, and those epithets are not confined to chief gods. But in many cities the phenomenon is undeniable: the roles of Athena at Athens and of Hera in Argos, Samos, and in many places in Magna Graecia are the model cases. Pausanias often identifies the god whom a community honors "most of all."<sup>58</sup>

It is because, say, Athena of Athens and Hera of Argos or Croton so resemble one another in this role that they have often been seen as late avatars of the "total goddess" or of a goddess who, if not total, possessed a bundle of attributes distinct from those of either Hera or Athena as described in Pausanias' myth (this is the "archaic substrate" theory mentioned above). But a hellenic myth (this is the "total god" in the sense of replacing all others; not, at any rate, in the one case that is open to really detailed observation, that of Athena at Athens. Specialized gods retain specialized functions even where a chief god exists. Even trespasses by chief gods on the domain of other gods are probably rare and restricted; that Tenos's leading god Poseidon was honored as "doctor" is unusual.<sup>59</sup>

The special goddess (to take the normal case) achieves her prominence, it can be argued, in two ways. On the one hand, every major god is a concertina that can be expanded or contracted. As we will see later, central human pre-occupations, such as child rearing or warfare, potentially involved many different gods, if in different ways. Where a goddess is chief god of a city, all her potential involvements become actual: the concertina is stretched to its fullest extent (with consequent contraction, but not suppression, in other cases). On the other hand, many appeals, many expressions of hope or gratitude, do not clearly relate to the recognized powers of a particular god; they are therefore addressed, by individuals and by the city, to their chief god. We saw earlier that the divine world was normally perceived in terms of an undifferentiated "the gods." An individual who wished, as Greeks often did, to vow a dedication should the next year prove successful for him evidently needed the favor of the gods in general. But offerings were made to particular gods, not to the gods as a collectivity. So in such cases the beneficiary was the chief local god. Spoils, sacred fines, and so on similarly went to enrich the central cult.

I revert from the special god to the division of functions. The "native model" of gods with differentiated honors fits rather closely with the structuralist tenet that meaning in a closed system is created by differentiation:

58. Cf. Pherne-Delforge, *Pausanias*, 262–63; cf., e.g., *LSA* 15.48–51, 33.16–19. On the "special god," see Parker, *Polytheism*, 395–97, 443–45 [n].

59. Philochorus *FGH* 328 F 175; confirmed by sanctuary layout though not by votives, according to R. Etienne and J. P. Braun, *Thésos I: Le sanctuaire de Poseidon et Amphitrée* (Paris, 1986), 185–86.

as the signal amber in a traffic light is meaningless in itself but meaningful in opposition to red and green, so Artemis is defined by opposition (say) to Aphrodite and Hera. Whether the comparison between a pantheon and a very restricted sign system such as a traffic light may not conceal important differences is a question that can be asked. However that may be, the best model to think with or against in analyzing the gods is that offered by structuralism. I extract here from the best applications of this model a series of overlapping propositions that fill out the central claim that the organization of functions in a pantheon is, in Marcel Detienne's phrase, "differential and classificatory."<sup>60</sup>

1. Any major god is active in a variety of spheres that we would naturally class as distinct, as, for instance, domestic, political, agricultural, military.<sup>61</sup>
  2. The god is not an arbitrary conglomerate of functions but has a central defining core, because—
  3. The god brings to the distinct spheres in which it is involved a mode of activity or cluster of such modes that is peculiar to that god.
  4. Gods are not therefore differentiated by spheres of activity, because spheres of activity such as the agricultural or political are common to many. They are differentiated by the mode or modes of activity<sup>62</sup> that they bring to the various spheres in which they are involved.
  5. That differentiation is absolute; where two gods apparently share a function, investigation will reveal that they exercise it in different ways.
  6. The defining core of a god is not a personality; it is rather a power/cluster of powers or modes of activity.
- One must also add, as an unstated premise underlying most of what precedes—

60. Some key items out of many are J. P. Vernant, "Hestia-Hermes," in his *Myth and Thought among the Greeks* (London, 1983; French original, 1965), 127–75; Vernant, "The Society of the Gods," in his *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece* (Harvester, 1980; French original, 1974), 92–109; M. Detienne, *The Gardens of Adonis* (Harvester, 1977; French original, 1972); Detienne and Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence* (the translator of all four books is Janet Lloyd). Since I am trying to use the model constructively, I omit an element that seems to me mistaken, the emphasis on specifically binary opposition as the vehicle of differentiation and meaning (as found, for instance, in Vernant's article "Hestia-Hermes"). As a heuristic device a binary comparison has often proved useful, but at a theoretical level I see no reason to contrast one god systematically with a single other: each letter of an alphabet contrasts with all the others, and so do gods.

61. Vernant, "Society of the Gods," 94.

62. A concept owed to G. Dumézil, e.g., *La religion romaine archaïque* (Paris, 1966), 179–80, 229.

7. It is legitimate to treat "Apollo," say, as an object of analysis; one is not reduced to analyzing, on the one side, "Apollo as represented in Panhellenic myth," and on the other a whole series of potentially divergent local Apollos.<sup>63</sup>

Proposition 1 is in many cases enlightening. To take an easy example, Aphrodite is not just the patroness of sexuality but also, as "Aphrodite of All the People," a source of civic harmony, and, as "Aphrodite Fair Voyage," a friend to sailors. As wife/cult-partner of Ares, she even has a certain relation, which is apparently not merely one of antithesis, with the world of war: in 480 BC, for instance, the women of Corinth are said to have prayed to the goddess to inspire in their menfolk "desire [n.b.] for battle against the barbarians."<sup>64</sup> Zeus is ruler of the world, controller of the climate, and also, as Zeus Ktesios ("of property"), steward of the domestic storeroom. But not all gods are so multidimensional. Demeter's explicit concerns relate merely to two closely related areas, fair crops and "fair birth" (not in the gynecological aspect, which belongs to Artemis and Eileithyia, but in terms of the woman's duty to produce healthy offspring). Hera too, as revealed by myths and epithets, is rather limited; she "holds the keys of marriage" and can consequently acquire a connection with childbirth, and she is the city-protecting special goddess in many places, but she seems to have no other regular spheres of activity.<sup>65</sup>

Proposition 2 on the list, as is clear from what was said above about the unity of the divine figure, is a strong taking of position on one side on a traditionally disputed topic. What is distinctive about structuralism is the kind of unifying principle that it offers (proposition 3), and its drastic refusal to allow for exceptions—occasional mutations or nonorganic developments—indeed to acknowledge the role of history at all.

63. As C. Sourvinou-Inwood recommends, *JHS* 98 (1978), 101–3 (= "Reading" *Greek Culture*, 147–51).

64. Plut. *De malignitate Herodoti* 39, 871A–B; cf. Pioniti, *Figures d'Aphrodite*, 248–56; that Aphrodite had a significant relation to war is a central thesis of the monograph.

65. I speak of Demeter's "explicit concerns" and of Hera "as revealed by myths and epithets" to bracket off in the one case the important but implicitly recognized (p. 241 below), and in the other where citizen women's role in the polis was ceremonially recognized (p. 241 below), and in the other the extended vision of Hera that archaeology, colonial archaeology in particular, may offer. I have not forgotten the association between Hera and bovines revealed by her Homeric epithet "cow-eyed," the herds attached to her cult in Argos and at Croton, and the myths connecting her with the animal in various ways. But is there evidence that herders in fact prayed to her for increase of their herds? On Hera see now V. Pirenne-Delforge and G. Pioniti in *La religion des femmes en Grèce antique*, ed. L. Bodlou and V. Mehl, 95–109 (Rennes, 2009).

The idea of "mode of activity" in proposition 3 raises some of the hardest questions. Whereas "spheres of activity" correspond quite closely with the indigenous concept of the "honors" assigned to each god, the Greeks did not ascribe distinctive modes of activity to their gods in the same way. But the concept might nonetheless catch an easily recognizable characteristic of the god. The most helpful illustration is again perhaps that of Aphrodite. Her role as "of all the people" is presumably to bring the citizens together in affection, as she brings together lovers;<sup>66</sup> and at sea she does not cause storms (as does Poseidon) but calms them, once again the charming and conciliatory power. She is therefore, it can be argued, the same smiling and persuasive goddess in each case; and the link between her activities in the different spheres is one that would have been easily perceived by a Greek.

The same can be said of the mode of activity ascribed to Athena in structuralist analysis, one that can even be expressed in a single Greek word often associated with the goddess, *μῆτις*, or "cunning intelligence." Again, Zeus's quality of sovereignty or mastery is made explicit in one of his commonest epithets, Zeus the King; and "madness" is an effective if crude summation of Dionysus's style.<sup>67</sup> The *Homeric Hymn to Poseidon* (22) associates that god with horses, the sea, and earthquakes, and a shared element can easily be identified in the power and dangerous violence of all three. Perhaps turbulence, and the power to overcome it, could be named as his mode of activity.<sup>68</sup> In the first application of structuralism to the Greek pantheon, Vernant built a systematic comparison between Hermes and Hestia around the mobility of Hermes and the fixity of Hestia.

Sometimes the unifying principle identified within a god's activities is harder to capture in simple words. Vernant has offered a superbly subtle and

66. On all this see Pirenne-Delforge in *Companion*, 311–23 [+]. On Aphrodite and the sea, note a neglected testimonium, Dionysius Byzantius *Antiplos Bosphori* (ed. R. Giegerich [Berlin, 1927]), 36, recording annual sacrifices by the inhabitants of Byzantium to "gentle Aphrodite," who is believed to moderate the force of winds (τέμενος Ἀφροδίτης, φροσύνην καὶ Ἀφροδίτης Πρωίας, ἢ καὶ ἔρος θύουσι Βυζαντινοὶ δοκεῖ γὰρ ἐν ταυτέναι τῶν ἀνέμων τὴν εὐκρασίαν, προθύουσα <καὶ> καλοταγμένη τὴν ἐπὶ πλεόντων ἀνθρώπων ταπεινότητα). On Aphrodite Pandemos I accept the traditional interpretation despite the lack of rigorous evidence, and despite the interesting reservations in relation to Aphrodite of Magistrates of J. Wallensten, *ΑΦΡΟΔΙΤΗ ΑΝΕΘΗΚΗΝ ΑΡΕΑΣ: A Study of Dedications to Aphrodite from Greek Magistrates* (Lund, 2003): Wallensten shows that Aphrodite has no special relation in cult to Homonoia, civic harmony. Pironi, *Figures d'Aphrodite*, stresses the less eirenic aspects of the goddess, which are incontestable; but worshippers who approach her obviously hope to see her smiling face.

67. Note how Teiresias builds on it when making extended claims for the god's spheres of activity: n. 53 above. It is not, however, through madness that Dionysus makes the vine and other plants grow. "Zeus of diseases" (Nostos), a doubtful reading in the archaic calendar *Miller* 1.3.31 a 8 (LSA 41), would, if verified, be hard to relate to Zeus's general persona.

68. "An embodiment of elemental force". Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 139.

comprehensive panorama of Artemis's powers whereby she is not, as has been often supposed, the "goddess of the outside" or "of the wild" but rather the goddess who presides over those contexts in human life where the civilized and the wild, culture and nature or culture and the human potential for bestiality, come into contact. The hunt is an obvious point of encounter between the two spheres; so too in a different way is childbirth, a violent and dangerous irruption of the merely physical within the human world; so too are those rituals of transition by which Artemis "acculturates" the young. As for warfare, Artemis is no warrior, but she receives offerings immediately before battle begins, the point at which violence, controlled or bestial, is about to break out. She also intervenes in battles as a savior at moments when the annihilation of one side, the destruction of a city and thus the negation of order, are in danger of occurring. "The hunt, the care of the young, childbirth, war, and battle—Artemis always operates as a divinity of the margins with the twofold power of managing the necessary passages between savagery and civilization and of strictly maintaining the boundaries at the very moment they have been crossed."<sup>69</sup> As a mode of action, "managing the necessary passages between savagery and civilization and... strictly maintaining the boundaries at the very moment they have been crossed" lacks the simplicity of Athena's cunning intelligence or Poseidon's turbulence or Aphrodite's persuasive charm. Indeed it is not strictly a mode of action comparable to them at all. But perhaps one should accept that unifying principles of different types could exist, and not fuss about words. As for the objection that ordinary Greeks did not think in terms of "the necessary passages between savagery and civilization," the answer might be that they nonetheless perceived them at a level below that of explicit consciousness; one role of Artemis was precisely, it can be argued, to give this fuzzy awareness a shape and name.

A comparable analysis of Hera has been presented by de Polignac.<sup>70</sup> He starts from two forms of votive offering that are distinctively characteristic of her early cult, though not exclusive to it, model houses and model ships; he notes that worshippers constantly bring her non-local objects as gifts, even in sanctuaries that are not obvious centers of international exchange; he

69. See "The Figure and Functions of Artemis in Myth and Cult," in Vernant's *Mortals and Immortals*, 195–206; the citation is from p. 204. The cults of Artemis within the city and with civic functions (particularly conspicuous in Athens: Osanna, *Atina*, 306–7) are a problem for this model, which Vernant seeks to address. *Mortals and Immortals*, 204–5.

70. F. de Polignac, "Héra, le navire et la demeure," in *Héra: Images, espaces, cultes*, ed. J. de La Genière, 113–22 (Naples, 1997). On the different relations of Hera and Artemis to the outside, *ibid.*, 118. The argument depends on treating the models as houses, not, as they are often seen, as temples.



of tackling an old issue; the attempt to distinguish one god from another rigorously and systematically is completely new. The paradigm case is the epithet "of horses" borne by both Athena and Poseidon. Poseidon embodies the power of the horse, the power needed to tame horses, and the potential of horses to resist control. Athena comes to the horse via skill and technology; she is associated with the driving of chariots and, above all, with the bit and bridle. In relation to seafaring, where Athena is a patroness of steersmen, their powers divide in similar ways.<sup>77</sup> These distinctions are well-grounded in evidence; and it can often be shown that, in spheres of life where many gods cluster (as, for instance, childbirth and child care; marriage; warfare; seafaring), they approach these crossroads down different paths.<sup>78</sup>

Two reservations can be made, however. First, it is not clear that there is any sphere of horsemanship or maritime life from which Poseidon is absolutely excluded; there is even an ode of Sophocles in which the invention of the bridle is ascribed to him and not, as elsewhere, to Athena.<sup>79</sup> It may be that Poseidon should be seen as the true and potentially omniscient master of these domains, Athena as a specialist who enters them via sharply defined functions. In that event we would be back, in the case of Poseidon, with distinctive spheres of activity as well as modes. Second, would these ideal distinctions, grounded in myths not necessarily widely known, be observed in the rough-and-tumble of cult practice? Structuralism postulates a large database of theological knowledge in the mind of every Greek, and a willingness to be bound by its implicit rules. A horseman told that Athena bore the title "of horses" might be forgiven for supposing her able to help him in any of his concerns.

Proposition six is one not confined to structuralism. Much can be said in its support. Rivers, winds, and abstractions such as Victory were gods; gods were manifested in physical phenomena such as lightning; all Greeks knew that Aphrodite was a power within themselves as well as a goddess on Olympus; the allegorists who identified Athena with "mind" or "reason" were only picking up on a very manifest trait of the goddess in myth. (On the other hand, Demeter became corn, a substance, not a power.) It is only to a limited extent that gods are divine equivalents of human statuses or professions: Hermes the herald, Hephaestus the smith, Zeus the king. Often they embody combinations impossible on earth: the hunter-god is a woman,

77. See Deidame and Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence*, chaps. 7 and 8.

78. Cf. P. Schmitt Pantel and L. Bruit Zaidman, *Religion in the Ancient Greek City*, trans. P. Cartledge (Cambridge, 1992), 186–91.

79. Soph. OC 707–19.

but an impossible woman who never marries; while Athena is supreme both in the masculine arts of war and in the feminine arts of weaving<sup>80</sup> (though, again, shunning marriage).

The opposite case, however, is pleaded by the whole mythological, poetic, and iconographic tradition, which so vividly presents the gods as beings of human form swayed by emotions, and embedded in family relationships, very like those of men. It is scarcely plausible to dismiss this, the main source of Greek imaginings of the divine world, as a delusive facade. Prayers and hymns constantly alluded to the family relationships among the gods, and it was surely relevant to the roles of Athena and Hera as preeminent protectresses of cities that the one was daughter, the other wife, of mighty Zeus; age and gender relationships are relevant too, if in complicated ways.<sup>81</sup> Above all, and gender relationships are relevant too, if in complicated ways.<sup>81</sup> Above all, gods were approached in cult as beings with whom interaction in the human terms of reciprocity and gift exchange was possible. (Such at any rate was the norm. We never hear the kinds of supplication that might be addressed, say, to a threatening wind.) Gods, we might say, were powers who were treated as if they were persons.<sup>82</sup>

The issues raised by proposition seven (one Apollo or a host of local Apollos?) were touched on above (in discussing "local divergence" and "archaic/foreign substrates"); they are relevant to any approach to Greek deity, not the structuralist alone. The justification a structuralist might give would be empirical: it does in fact prove possible to interpret both the Panhellenic and the local figures within the same framework, by reference to the same cluster of modes of activities. And that claim is often enough persuasive (as in the contrasting analyses of Athena and Poseidon, which often use evidence from local cult) to have force. But this partial empirical confirmation does not

80. "Meanwhile Athena at her father's door/let fall the robe her own hands had embroidered.... /Armor of grievous war she buckled on": Hom. *Il.* 8.364–86, 388 (trans. R. Fitzgerald). Whence N. Loraux's argument in a well-known essay that goddesses are more deities than women: "What is a Goddess?" in *A History of Women in the West*, ed. P. Schmitt Pantel, trans. A. Goldhammer, 1:11–45 (Cambridge, Mass., 1992).

81. The relation between young Apollo and young men is an obvious illustration in respect of age. Women have few occasions to turn to male gods except for healing. Men by contrast have much need of goddesses. The argument of P. Friedrich (*The Meaning of Aphrodite* [Chicago, 1978], 82–85) that these male-female interactions track those within human families is interesting, if anachronistic in the types of family stereotypes it postulates. He takes, for instance, Athena the helper of warriors as a projection of the supportive elder sister; but the elder sisters of warriors would tend to be married. It is plausible, however, that Athena's role as helper is a feminine one: for Heraclitus, say, to need help from another man would detract from his own manliness.

82. Similar compromises are recommended by Bremmer, *Greek Religion*, 23, and K. Dowden in *Companion*, 55. Reciprocity: cf. the essays of J. M. Bremer and R. Parker in C. Gill et al., eds., *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece* (Oxford, 1998).

establish a general principle. The possibility that a local cult has gone its own way can never be excluded.

I conclude the discussion of the structuralist model with some important limitations to its power. That model seeks to show how, within the spheres in which it is involved, each deity is active in a way distinctive to itself. But it has no way of predicting in what spheres the deity will be active. The power that Aphrodite exercises at sea is one of calming and conciliation, appropriate to herself. But there was no necessity that she should exercise her powers at sea at all; she does not calm storms on land. Zeus's control of the thunderbolt is a symbol of his general sovereignty, we can allow. But power over the sea or over earthquakes could equally have been a symbol of cosmic control. Conversely, why could not turbulent Poseidon have wreaked atmospheric havoc on land? The explanation for these distributions of activity seems partly to lie in history (an ancient division of what we will have to call spheres of activity between Zeus and Poseidon, for instance), partly in market demand: numerous gods become involved, each in their own way, with seafaring, child care, and marriage, for instance, because of the complicated human anxieties associated with these crucial activities and experiences.<sup>83</sup>

There is also the matter raised above of the concertina character of gods. Structuralism describes the gods as, so to speak, Platonic forms, not as embodied in the cult practice of any particular place. But the different degrees of expansion and contraction of different gods in different cities, to say nothing of the varying supporting cast of lesser deities, meant that different local pantheons bore strikingly different aspects. The question of why, say, Athena's powers are so extensive in Athens and those of Hera so limited is not one that structuralism can answer.

Another issue not addressed by structuralism is the open character of the pantheon, and the place of new gods. Structuralism was a reaction, and an appropriate one, to treatments that saw the fundamental question about a pantheon as being "What god came from where?" But gods did from time to time rise to prominence in Greece, or enter Greece from abroad, who had no place in the distribution of functions as described in Hesiod and the *Homeric Hymns*: Mother and her attendants, Asclepius, and later Isis are very successful instances, Sabazius and Bendis rather less so. The classic objection brought against functionalism—if society is such a well-functioning machine, how does change ever occur?—also strikes structuralism if it fails to explain through what cracks and crevices new gods were able to enter. Even when gods did not actually enter Greece from abroad, neighboring

pantheons are surely likely to have had an influence. We noted above that foreign gods were treated as variants of Greek gods and could be assimilated via the cult-epithet system in such forms as Zeus Ammon or Zeus Thebaeus. In these circumstances it would be very odd if "Greek" and "foreign" gods (but seen by their worshippers as different forms of the same god) never passed traits one to another. One may wonder finally whether, and if so how, the structural relations between the gods of archaic and classical Greece persisted unchanged in the Hellenistic period. Questions about the character of the Hellenistic pantheon remain in fact very largely still to pose.

This chapter has sought to show how hard it is to answer the question "What is a Greek god?" from which it started. Familiar gods such as Zeus rub shoulders with winds and rivers (and goat-faced Pan) and deified abstractions and, in the Hellenistic period, deified mortals. Zeus himself is both a personality with a history and, in some respects, a force of nature; in cult he is divided into almost as many pieces as there are sanctuaries dedicated to him (so, too, the other great gods), and is often treated de facto as if he were a consortium of gods rather than a single god with many facets. Structuralism traces, often with great success, the lines of demarcation that keep the great gods from spilling over into one another. But the Greeks often did not know whether a figure such as Eileithyia was a minor independent goddess or an aspect of a greater power.

Outside the context of cult, where every god had a name (uncertain though it might be what that name designated), the individual gods coalesced into "the gods," "god," "the divine." Carneades in the second century BC ridiculed Stoic attempts to rationalize traditional cult practice with a series of arguments of "little-by-little" or "soritic" form: "If Zeus is a god, Poseidon as his brother will be a god. But if Poseidon is a god, Achelous too will be a god. And if Achelous, the Nile too. If the Nile, every river. If every river, torrents too must be gods, and if torrents, then watercourses too. But watercourses are not. So Zeus is not a god either. But if gods had existed, Zeus too would have been a god. So gods do not exist." Some fourteen further arguments of like form are preserved.<sup>84</sup> Carneades' aim was not, Cicero's speaker explains, "to abolish the gods—for what could less befitt a

84. In Sext. *Math.* 9, 182-90 and Cic. *Nat. D.* 3, 43-52; cf. P. Cousin, "Les sorites de Carnéade contre le polythéisme," *REG* 54 (1941): 43-57. They differ from the classic type of sorites argument ("If two grains are not a heap, nor are three; if three are not, nor are four," and so on ad infinitum) in that "the successive conditionals do not derive from a single general principle but from justificatory grounds which Carneades has to supply, and the justification stated or suggested varies with the argument" (and even within a single argument); M. F. Burnyeat, "Gods and Heaps," in *Language and Logos*, ed. M. Schofield and M. Nussbaum, 315-38 (Cambridge, 1982), at 328.

philosopher?—but to prove that the Stoics failed to offer any explanation of the gods.”<sup>85</sup> “Godness” is a predicate that no definition can circumscribe.<sup>86</sup> The attempt to confer logical coherence on polytheism is a hopeless enterprise. But the incoherence made it all the more flexible a tool for coping with the diversity of experience.

### Coda: A Greek Pantheon

After so many words of synthesis, let us turn to a concrete document. It is not merely through the accidents of survival of evidence that we cannot list “the gods” of a Greek city. No such lists ever existed. If all the civic bodies of a given city (the city itself, *tribes*, *phratries*, *demes*, and so on) had ever all simultaneously prepared calendars of their sacrifices and these had all survived, one could in principle repair the ancients’ omission and create a list of all the gods and heroes honored at public expense in that city. For some subgroups, the Attic *demes* above all, a complete list or something close to it does survive; and the size of those subgroup lists shows that a total list would be a very long document. But such a procedure would still not capture the gods of private associations and private foundations, tolerated but not financed by the city. Nor would it include figures whose divinity the Greeks of a particular city might well concede even if no cult of them happened to exist there (Kronos, for instance, in cities that had no cult of him, and many personifications.) The divine world as perceived by a Greek was never limited to the gods actually worshipped.

These limitations aside, such simultaneous calendar making by all relevant bodies doubtless never occurred, and has certainly not left a product available for our use. What are occasionally at our disposal are documents that, for chance administrative reasons, present an extensive selection of public cults. The fragmentary records of the “Treasures of the Other Gods” (“other” than Athena, the city’s patron goddess) issued in Attica in the 420s reveal over forty heroes and “gods” (for these purposes Poseidon Hippios and Poseidon Kalauates, say, count as two separate gods) important enough to have funds at their disposal.<sup>87</sup> The other such partial panorama comes from Erythrae in Asia Minor, from where we have a record of the sales tax

85. *Nat. D.* 3.44. Cicero’s authority for this interpretation is not clear.

86. “On ne peut donner du dieu une définition qui convienne à tout le défini et au seul défini.” P. Cousin, 1941, 46; cf. Burnyeat, 1982, 330–33; S. R. F. Price, *JHS* 104 (1984): 80.

87. *IG* 1<sup>3</sup>.369 and 383.

levied on the sale of public priesthoods over a period of thirty to forty years (c. 300–260 BC). The record covers only priesthoods of the city that were assigned by sale (others may have been transmitted in other ways), and only those that came up for sale in the relevant period; and breaks of the stone have removed the record for some years. The total is nonetheless impressive. The prices realized by the sales are also recorded; as different types of sale are involved, these are not all comparable one with another, but in a very broad way it is safe to conclude that the cult of Hermes Agoraios (sale price 4,610 drachmas) or Aphrodite in Daphneion (2,040 dr.) was much more popular than that of Earth (10 dr.). As it happens, a long though incomplete sacrificial calendar from about a century later also survives from Erythrae, and reveals several further cults.<sup>88</sup> The table that follows combines the evidence of the two documents (see table 1).

The priesthood sales record gives the prices in drachmas realized for each priesthood, in two main forms, a standard sale (here in bold) and a form of (probably) secondary selling that normally realized less. Where two figures linked by “and” are given, the priesthood was sold more than once in the period covered. Fully preserved entries list both the actual sale price and the sales tax paid. Sale prices were divided into six bands for tax purposes: 5 dr., for instance, was levied on any sale between 100 and 199 dr., 10 on sales between 200 and 999, and so on. Sometimes the actual price is not preserved on the stone but must be estimated from the sales tax, which is. Figures given in a form such as 1,000–1,999 are of this type.

Some broad observations will be in place here, not a detailed commentary. In almost all documents of this type, there are in fact elements that defy comment: cults located in places of which we know nothing, epithets we cannot explain, heroes or even gods otherwise unattested. The local particularism that creates the partial illegibility of such texts is a crucial datum. In Hellenistic Erythrae, however, the Olympians clearly predominate, if sometimes in unfamiliar form. This text is one of many that comprehensively refute many familiar clichés about Hellenistic religion: one looks in vain for the interruption of Fortune, Asclepius, and “oriental gods”; and “King Alexander,” and in the later text Antiochus, though prominent, take their place amid a vast array of traditional cults. The high prices of the priesthoods of Hermes and Aphrodite imply a high volume of what must surely be private traffic; personal religion flourishes, but within an Olympian conduit. Alongside the great Olympians there is the usual scatter of lesser gods: that such a scatter

88. Respectively *IErythrai* 201 (*LSA* 25 + a new frag.) and *IErythrai* 207 (*LSA* 26) + SEG 30.1327.

Table 1. Gods with Public Priesthoods and Recipients of Public Sacrifices in Erythrae from Two Key Documents, Third to Second Century BC

SALES-TAX RECORD OF PRIESTHOODS (c. 300-260 BC)		SACRIFICIAL CALENDAR OF GODS WHO RECEIVED OFFER- INGS (SECOND CENTURY BC)	
God	Sale price (drachmas)		
<b>Major gods</b>			
Aphrodite in Daphneion (?)	2,000+ and 2,040		
Aphrodite Pandemos	200		
Aphrodite Pythochrestos	300 and 130	Aphrodite Scateia Apollo Apotropaios	
Apollo Enagionos	230	Apollo Hebdonaios Pythios	
Apollo in Kl. Jelleia	Not preserved		
Apollo in Koltoi	810		
Apollo in Sabertidai	150		
Apollo Kaukasus, Artemis Kaukas, Apollo Lykeios, Apollo Delios, and the river Aleon	270	the river Aleon Apollo Pythios Epikemonios Apollo, Artemis, Leto Apollo at the Gate	
Artes	1,070		
Artemis Aithopia	2,000-2,999	Artemis Apobacteria Artemis at the Gate Artemis (?) Sorcira	
Artemis Phosphoros	50-99		
Athena Nike	120		
Athena []	70	Athens Polias	
Demeter Chloë	60 and 101	Demeter Eleusinia	
Demeter in Kolonai	600 and 1,300		
Demeter and Kore Demetrios	190		
Demeter and Kore Pythochrestos	210		
Dionysus	80		
Dionysus Baccheus	100	Dionysus Phleus	
Dionysus Pythochrestos	105		
Hera Teleia	500-999 and 251		

SALES-TAX RECORD OF PRIESTHOODS  
(c. 300-260 BC)

SACRIFICIAL CALENDAR OF  
GODS WHO RECEIVED OFFER-  
INGS (SECOND CENTURY BC)

Hermes Agoraios	4,610 and 4,600	Hermes Agoraios
Hermes Pylios Harnaeus	270	Hermes
Kore Soteire	302	Poseidon Asphaleios at the Gate Poseidon Hippios
Poseidon Phytalmios	136	
Zeus Apotropaios and Athena Apotropai	181 and 52 and 150	
Zeus Basileus	230	Zeus Boulaios
Zeus Eleutherios	300 and 1,000-1,999	
Zeus Hypatos	200-999	
Zeus Olympios	Not preserved	
Zeus Phemios and Athena Phenia	140	
Zeus Philios	1,300	Zeus Soter
<b>Other gods</b>		
Ablabiai	400	
Corybantes Euphronieioi and Thalciol (?)	Female section 610 Male section 180 and 171	
Earth	10	
Enyo and Enyalios	70	Great Gods
Great Mother	480	Great Mother Hekate Helios
Hestia Boulai	830	
Hestia Temenia		200-999 and 105
Theoi Prokukioi	400 and 105	"The goddesses behind"
<b>Personifications</b>		
Agathe Tyche	200-999 and 100	Agathe Tyche Arct

(continued)

Table 1 Continued.

SALES-TAX RECORD OF PRIESTHOODS (c. 300–260 BC)		SACRIFICIAL CALENDAR OF GODS WHO RECEIVED OFFER- INGS (SECOND CENTURY BC)	
Personifications (cont.)			
Eirene	500	Eirene	
		Homonoia	
		Nike	
Heroes			
Achilles, Thetis, the Nereids	Not preserved and 80	Anchianax	
		Adamas	
Dioscuri	500 and 200–999	Erythros	
Heracles	1,921	Heracles	
		Heracles Kallinikos	
		Heracles Kallinikos at the Gate	
		[ ] hero	
Heroes	440	Phanagoras	
Monarchs and such			
King Alexander	1,000–1,999	King Alexander	
		King Antiochos	
		The Kings	
		Rome	
		Queen (Stratonike)	
Unidentified, unclear			
[ ] Epimachos	200	Epimachos	
		[ ] Epitichea	
		[ ] at Leuke	
		[ ] to Minus	
[ ]	820 and 710		

Note: Bold indicates a standard sale, nonbold a secondary sale, and underlining indicates a form of sale known as *diaprosaitis*. On the types of sale, see Dignas, *Economy of the Sacred*, 252–55.

will exist in any given city is predictable, though not its detailed contents. Personifications have a certain place, while natural forces are represented directly only by the river Aleon and by Helios; but the Erythraeans may well have honored nymphs and performed rites of aversion to winds without having instituted public priesthods of either. The chthonians are represented by the Abiabiai, the “Harmlessnesses,” a unique and surely euphemistically named group. Few heroes appear, apart from the ubiquitous Heracles and the Dioscuri; but throughout the Greek world there were many more heroes than there were priests of heroes.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Power and Nature of Heroes

Few religions, it has been noted, get by with a cast consisting simply of major gods and mortals. In Greece, Titans, Giants, Satyrs, Silens, Corybantes, Kouretes, Telchines, Dakryls, Hours, Graces, and nymphs complicate the picture, to say nothing of other abstract qualities discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>1</sup> Some of these figures of difficult classification exist primarily in myth (Titans, Giants) or representation (Satyrs), while others are recipients of cult. Among these last much the most important are the heroes.

#### The Nature of Heroes

I shall approach them with some generalizations about the heroes of the classical age that come close to being uncontroversial, though they do not quite achieve it. Heroes were dead mortals believed by Greeks to have retained

1. See Brelich, *Eroi*, 325–35. For an excellent introduction to Greek heroes, see Ekroth in *Companion*, 100–14; note too A. Seifert in *ThesCR4* 4:24–38, on hero shrines. I steer clear of the fascinating issues attaching to postclassical hero cult, now well treated by C. P. Jones, *New Heroes in Antiquity: From Achilles to Antinous* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010). I sketch the problem of the early history of hero cult in appendix 5, below p. 287.