

KEY THEMES IN ANCIENT HISTORY

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RELIGIONS OF THE ANCIENT GREEKS

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- (iv) a stone temple built by the heroes Trophonios and Agamedes, burnt down in 548 BC.²²

Though it might be tempting to find archaeological correlates of all four of these temples, the temptation should be resisted. Though there might have been an eighth-century temple at Delphi constructed out of laurel and with an apsidal end, it is more likely that the laurel temple (i) is a refraction of the importance of the laurel in the cult of Apollo. There was an all-stone temple at Delphi from 675–650 BC, but temples (ii), (iii) and (iv) are likewise mythical creations designed to express ideas about the ideal evolution of Delphi from nature to humanity through the divine and heroic spheres.

The point that we must not, in the first instance, interpret archaeological evidence in the light of written evidence can also be seen in another Delphic example. A myth, perhaps originating in the Hellenistic period, told how the site of Delphi was first discovered by a goatherd who had lost some animals down a chasm in the rocks.²³ When he approached the spot, he was overcome by vapours and began to prophesy. A vivid story, which was taken at face value by some modern scholars who asserted that this explained the workings of oracular prophecy at Delphi. Unfortunately, the geology of Delphi is such that there can never have been actual vapours, and there was, at most, only a symbolic chasm in the temple itself.

Archaeological evidence and the written record each need some care in their interpretation and should ideally be studied in isolation before they are combined. The structures of the texts are themselves at least as interesting as the 'factual' details in them. One cannot pile together 'facts' culled from texts without regard for contexts, in categories of which one is unconscious and which may well be inappropriate. The historian of Greek religions needs to be alert both to modern categories and questions, and also to those of the ancients.

²² Pindar, *Eighth Paean* 58–99; Pausanias 10.5.9–13. Cf. Sourvinou-Inwood 1979.

²³ Diodorus Siculus 16.26. Cf. Price 1985.

CHAPTER 2

Gods, myths and festivals

According to a Christian writer of the second century, the Greeks had 365 gods.¹ For the proponent of one (Christian) god this alleged fact demonstrated the absurdity of Greek religion. Moderns too sometimes assume the nobility and superiority of one supreme god ('monotheism') as against the proliferation of little gods ('polytheism'). But the number of the Greek gods (not as great as 365) does not mean that those gods lack significance, any more than does the multiplicity of gods in the Hindu tradition.² In addition, proponents of monotheism (whether Jewish, Christian or Islamic) are often not ready to note the disruptive consequences of monotheistic intolerance or the extent to which alleged monotheisms contain plural elements. Within Christianity, what about the Trinity, the Blessed Virgin Mary, or the Saints? In fact the categories 'monotheism' and 'polytheism' do not promote historical understanding. In both ethnography/anthropology and ancient history scholars have sometimes sought to 'rescue' polytheism by arguing for an element of monolatry or henotheism, in which the power of one god in the pantheon is proclaimed as supreme.³ But the manoeuvre is conditioned by a Judaeo-Christian evaluation of monotheism. The terms 'polytheism' and 'monotheism' are best abandoned to the theologians.

PANHELLENIC MYTHS

The principal Panhellenic Greek deities were quite limited in number, though infinitely extensible via epithets: Zeus, Hera, Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Poseidon, Aphrodite, Hermes, Hephaistos, Ares, Demeter, and

¹ Proclaimed by Orpheus: Theophilus, *To Autolykus* 3.2 (trans. R.M. Grant, Oxford 1970); also Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 1.7.6–7 (trans. M.F. McDonald, *Fathers of the Church* 49, Washington DC 1964). Cf. below, p. 161.

² Historiographical debates: Schmidt 1987; Hinduism: Fuller 1992.

³ Desy in Schmidt 1987; Versnel 1990a.

Dionysos.⁴ These 'twelve Olympians', the number that became conventional in the fifth century BC, formed a family. Zeus, 'father of gods and men', was at its head, Hera his sister-wife, and the others his siblings or children. The family structure was important up to a point: a nephew (Apollo) or a niece (Athena) might yield to an uncle (Poseidon) in Homeric contests.⁵ However, the extent of detail of family trees given in modern books and wall charts is very misleading. There was no one canonical ancient version and the Greeks were not bothered whether or not Poseidon was a first cousin of Demeter. What mattered was that they were related, that they all lived together on Mount Olympus and that there were other 'chthonic' (*chthon* = 'earth') gods who lived beneath the earth, Hades king of the underworld and his wife Persephone.

Stories about this family were told or represented in many different contexts.⁶ Children heard the myths at the knees of their mothers or nurses.⁷ Aristocratic men in archaic and classical Greece attending their *sumposia* (formalised drinking parties) liked to tell myths.⁸ As we shall see later, myths were omnipresent in sanctuaries and festivals, both iconographically and verbally. They were also very visible in other public places: in the Athenian agora, for example, one stoa (portico) gained its name 'Painted' because it served to display four fifth-century BC paintings by the outstanding artists of the day on mythical and historical topics (cf. below, p. 22). The thousands of extant vases of the seventh to fourth centuries BC depict scenes of the gods and heroes. Some of them are influenced by now lost works in other media (paintings, tapestries, metalwork), others are fresh creations of the individual pot painter. The contexts of these pots is important. They are the product of artists, including non-Greek slaves, working in different states and should ideally not all be lumped together as 'Greek'. Many of the pots, though preserved for us because they were exported to Etruria in Italy where they were buried in chamber tombs, were designed in the first instance for the aristocratic Greek *sumposion*. Myth-telling and the pottery for the wine-drinking were complementary.⁹

The most notable tellings of Greek myths were the works of Homer

⁴ Introduction: Guthrie 1950. For some approaches to Dionysos see McGinty 1978.

⁵ Homer, *Iliad* 21.469; *Odyssey* 6.329–30, 13.341–2. Cf. Euripides, *Troades* 48–52 (Athena and Poseidon). ⁶ Buxton 1994: 18–66.

⁷ Plato, *Republic* 377a; Dionysios of Halikarnassos, *Thucydides* 6–7; cf. Aristophanes, *Wasps* 1174 ff.; below, p. 129.

⁸ Xenophanes 1.19–23, trans. Loeb *Elegy and Iambus* 1, criticised the usual absurd tales; cf. below, p. 127, for his other criticisms of myths.

⁹ Bérard 1989 explores the imagery of Athenian pottery; Carpenter 1991 systematises this material. On the imagery of the *sumposion* on pottery see Lissarrague 1990.

and Hesiod. The Homeric narratives describe interactions between the gods and the human protagonists: how Apollo attacked Patroclus in battle (*Iliad* 16.778), or how Athena gave guidance to Telemachos (*Odyssey* 1.178–323). Such interactions between gods and humans, and other Homeric stories about the gods, presuppose a degree of anthropomorphism: that the gods are like humans. Though this was a lasting legacy in Greece, sometimes criticised by later generations (below, p. 127), Homer equally emphasises that gods were also unlike humans, in their power and their immortality.¹⁰ When characters in Homer talk about divine interventions, they use not the names of specific deities, which the narrator uses, but indeterminate terms like a god (*theos*) or divine being (*daimon*). Hesiod's *Theogony* is a systematic treatise on the Greek pantheon, which has at its centre the establishment of the rule of Zeus and how he mastered challenges to it by other powers (Titans, Typhoeus).

The pre-eminence of Hesiodic thinking can be seen, for example, in the iconography of the massive altar of Zeus and Athena built at Pergamon in north-west Asia Minor in the second century BC. The wonderfully dramatic sculpture running 110 metres round the podium on which the altar stood celebrated the successful struggle of these and the other gods against the giants (Fig. 2.1). The casual observer could readily understand the frieze, but the attributes of the gods and the fact that all the gods and giants were also labelled would permit the more learned and leisurely viewer to appreciate the complex iconographical scheme of the monument. It deals with the battle of the Gods and the Giants, which does not appear in the *Theogony*, but Hesiod's account of a struggle of the divine order against a threat from outside was the inspiration for later accounts, which invented the battle of the Giants and then often conflated the two battles of the Titans and the Giants.¹¹

Homer and Hesiod were, as we have seen, privileged texts in the articulation of the Greek pantheon, but this did not mean that their stories were definitive. Neither author claims divine revelation, though both claim that the divine omniscience of the Muses, daughters of Zeus, remedied their own ignorance.¹² Nor was either writer comprehensive. Homer's *Iliad* focuses on four days of fighting during the ten-year Trojan war, and the *Theogony* is a genealogy of the gods, not a recounting of all the exploits known to the author. Subsequent writers, therefore, could

¹⁰ Griffin 1980: 144–204; Vernant 1991: 27–49; cf. also Burkert 1991.

¹¹ Cf. Smith 1991: 155–80. See further *LMC* 4: 202–7; Kästner 1994.

¹² Homer, *Iliad* 2.484–93; Hesiod, *Theogony* 1–35.

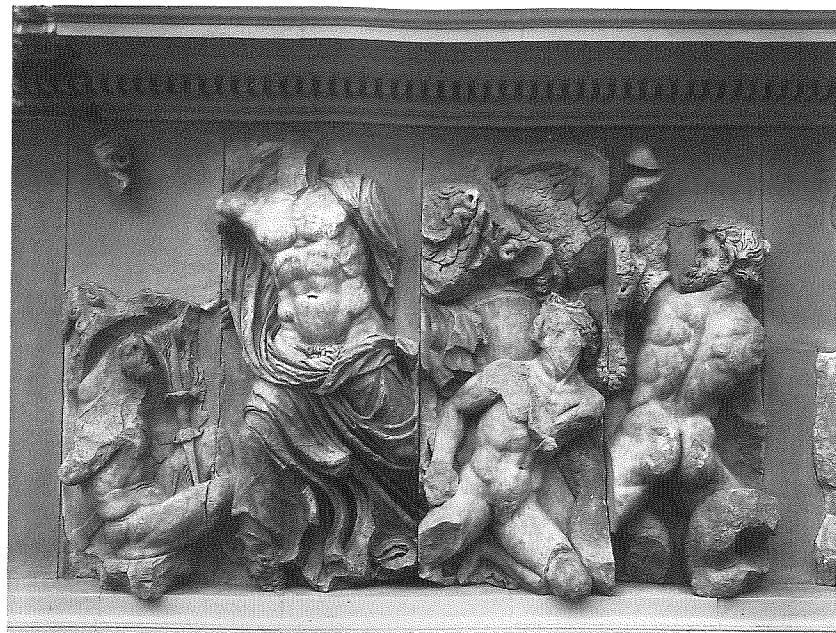


Fig. 2.1. Part of the east frieze of the altar of Zeus and Athena, Pergamon (height 2.30m). In the centre Zeus is about to slay, with the thunderbolt in his right hand, a kneeling giant (Porphyryon?). To the left a captured giant watches; to the right a snake-legged giant (Typhon?), below the eagle of Zeus.

fill in the gaps left by Homer and Hesiod – such were the other, now lost, Homeric epics of the archaic period, and (especially important for mythology) the *Catalogue of Women*, a continuation of Hesiod's *Theogony* which was accepted in antiquity as being by Hesiod but which probably dates to the sixth century BC. They were also, as we shall see, at liberty to offer novel tellings of familiar tales. The tradition of telling and retelling myths extends from the archaic period right down to the mid-fifth century AD when Nonnos composed his great epic on Dionysos.¹³ Ancient scholarly handbooks of mythology were composed mainly between c. 250 BC and AD 150, but they could not cope with all the variants and conflicting versions. They fell into two types. One set of mythological studies collected myths to aid in understanding major Greek authors. For example, in the imperial period there circulated a huge collection of myths as background to Homer. The second category

¹³ Bowersock 1990: 41–9; Hopkinson 1994.

of mythological works took particular themes, such as love stories, transformation tales or genealogies. The principal extant example is the *Library* said to be by Apollodorus (first or second century AD), which is organised in terms of mythical genealogies, and which has been the foundation for many modern handbooks of Greek mythology.¹⁴ Given that Greek myths were not rigid, it is methodologically very important that we respect the individual telling or representation of the myths. It is absurd to weave together a compendium of Greek mythology from extracts in different authors.¹⁵

Reflection on the standing of the stories of Homer and Hesiod is attested already in the sixth and fifth centuries BC,¹⁶ and the iconography of sanctuaries also demonstrates the existence of privileged stories about the gods. Difficulties arose when historians and antiquarians sought to construct narratives down to the present on the basis of mythical tales. Was it reasonable for a writer in the classical period to treat a traditional tale about Theseus, the hero who united Attica, in the same way as one about the tyrant Peisistratos in the sixth century BC? Some writers did attempt to do just this, for example Hellanicus, writing the first history of Attica in the 420s BC; later historians of Attica, in the fourth century, were similarly committed to recounting a continuous tradition from Kekrops, the first king of Athens. But others took a more critical line to distinguish mythical from human history (below, p. 131). Just where that line was to be drawn was a matter of arbitrary personal judgement. Herodotos put King Minos of Crete in the mythical category unlike the sixth-century tyrant of Samos Polycrates (3.122), while Thucydides was perfectly happy to refer to Minos' dominion of the sea (1.4). Four hundred years later the geographer Strabo still found it necessary to assert his (personal) distinction between myth and history (1.2.35). Some degree of rationalisation was necessary, from the classical period onwards, if myth was to be recuperated for history.

Modern approaches to these myths have been very varied, but all distance themselves from Plato's rejection of others' myths as obnoxious and therefore false stories and all assume that myths are ways of constructing meaning, whether they are Greek myths of gods and Titans, Christian myths of the incarnation or New Age myths of Atlantis.¹⁷

¹⁴ Henrichs 1987. For best translation and commentary of Apollodorus see Aldrich 1975 and Simpson 1976; also Loeb and World's Classics.

¹⁵ Morford and Lenardon 1995, a work so much used for teaching that it is now in its fifth edition; cf. Rose 1958. ¹⁶ Xenophanes, below, p. 127; Herodotos, above, p. 6.

¹⁷ Cf. Calame 1991a on Greek categories 'myth' and 'ritual'.

There is no one modern method which is the key to all mythologies; different approaches seem to reveal different aspects of the subject; one needs to be eclectic, depending on the material one is considering and the objectives one has, and one needs to be alert to the dangers of imposing a modern model of myth (which arose in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment) onto the Greeks.¹⁸

The origins of Greek myths have interested many scholars. Though the details are largely lost to us, the origins of the Greek gods and their stories are certainly varied.¹⁹ The Greeks were Indo-Europeans and the names of their gods go back to Indo-European prototypes. Most clearly Zeus Pater (father) is cognate with Roman Dies Pater (Jupiter) and the Indian Dyaus Pitar (the sky), regarded in the ancient Indian sacred books, the Vedas, as the father and with the earth the origin of everything. But etymology tells us very little, and priority should be given to the function of the deities.²⁰ In our earliest evidence the (hypothetical) Indo-European mythology does not survive in a pure form. It is already an amalgam with elements borrowed from the Near East. The close parallels between Aphrodite and the love goddess of the Near East Inanna, the main divinity of the Sumerians circa 3,000 to 2,100 BC, the Semitic Ishtar and the Phoenician Astarte, suggest that Greek ideas of Aphrodite were at least in part modelled on those deities.²¹ The backbone of Hesiod's *Theogony*, the succession list, also has Near Eastern origins. In the beginning were Gaia (Earth), and Ouranos (Heaven), but Ouranos used to prevent his children being born until Gaia incited his son Kronos to castrate him. Kronos in turn swallowed his own children for fear of being overthrown by one of them until Rhea gave birth secretly to Zeus on Crete and gave Kronos a stone to devour in his place. When Zeus had grown up he forced his father to disgorge the children whom he had swallowed and, with their and other people's aid, he overthrew Kronos and his Titans.²² Although the story is fully assimilated to a Greek context, some of its elements can be understood much better with reference to Near Eastern deities. Knowing for example that Zeus' name is cognate with the ancient Indian word for 'sky' makes more comprehensible his relation to Ouranos, 'Heaven'. In fact, earlier versions of the succession story exist in various Near Eastern languages, including

¹⁸ Edmunds 1990, Bruit Zaidman and Schmitt Pantel 1992: 143–214, and Graf 1993a: chs. 1–2 between them survey the main current approaches. Buxton 1994 argues for eclecticism. See also Dowden 1992 and Calame 1996: 5–55. Vernant 1980: 186–242 remains a good introduction.

¹⁹ See Mondi 1990. ²⁰ Dumézil 1968–73: 1.11.

²¹ Friedrich 1978; Burkert 1987b; see further Burkert 1992a: 88–127. For a cult of Phoenician Aphrodite, see below, pp. 76–7. ²² Detienne and Vernant 1978: 57–130.

the Akkadian epic of creation, sometimes known from its first two words as *Enuma Elish*, dating probably to the second millennium BC, and certainly recited at the new year festival in Babylon.²³ The stories contain close parallels to Hesiod's succession of gods, including also castration, swallowing and a stone.

The origins of myths have also been sought in their relationship to rituals. Myths of sacrifice or specific local myths are indeed sometimes said to be derived from actual ritual procedures.²⁴ In one modern formulation of this old theory sacrificial rituals themselves are then traced back to the palaeolithic period by means of parallels from modern hunter-gatherer societies; parallels with animal behaviour then suggest that the need for such rituals is located at a very deep level.²⁵ Much of this is wishful thinking based on a peculiar selection of Greek data and an inadmissible retrojection of the practice of contemporary 'primitives'.

A variation of this search for meaning through origins lays great emphasis on 'initiation' as a category for understanding both myth and rituals.²⁶ Initiation rituals or 'rites de passage' are held to underlie many if not all myths, for example, that of the Athenian *arrhephoroi*.²⁷ As a matter of fact classical Greece had very few initiation rituals and so the theory hypothesised that, while rituals had been lost or transformed, myths continued to be told in the classical and later periods. Compulsive detection of initiation rituals can be rather arbitrary and in the end casts little light on Greece of historic periods.

The search for origins cannot be the end of an enquiry into myths or rituals. In fact, the borrowing of a myth from the Near East does not entail that the myth had no meaning for the Greeks. Aphrodite is a composite figure whose Greek configurations are different from the originals, and Hesiod's succession myths make good Greek sense in emphasising the struggles lying behind the present sovereignty of the world. Zeus' first wife Metis ('Cunning Intelligence') was to have given birth first to Athena and then to a son who would overthrow Zeus. Zeus therefore swallowed Metis, gave birth himself to Athena (through his head), and prevented the birth of the son. Zeus' rule was not to be challenged.²⁸ That is, study of origins has to lead to a synchronic study of contemporary meanings.

²³ Trans. Dalley 1989: 233–77. ²⁴ Versnel 1990b.

²⁵ Burkert 1983, supported by Versnel 1990b. Cf. below, pp. 35–6, on sacrifice.

²⁶ Versnel 1990b: 44–59.

²⁷ Burkert 1983: 150–4; below, pp. 91–5, on *arrhephoroi*.

²⁸ Hesiod, *Theogony* 886–900; cf. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 168–75.

The most influential contemporary studies of the synchronic meanings of myths, originating in France, have shown how Greek myths are ways of thinking about issues fundamental to society. They have explored the structures of thought and particular tellings of myths as structures that are common to many or all of the surviving versions. Analyses have been made both of texts and of images. The foundations of civilisation and its defence against disorder preoccupy both Hesiod and the kings of Pergamon. This reading of the story is fairly unproblematic, except that, in Hesiod, the Titans are not external monsters but kin of Zeus who have to be expelled from the society of heaven. Not all foes can be so easily identified or conquered. Other myths might explore the limits of rule by one man. In the story of Oedipus, that his name is derived from his lameness suggests the unsoundness of his royal rule. Similar stories of left-handedness or lameness circulated concerning Greek tyrants of the seventh century BC, which shows the durability of some patterns of thought.²⁹ In addition, major members of the Panhellenic pantheon were female, an obvious fact, but one whose implications for a patriarchal society are surely surprising and far reaching. Athena or Demeter were at least sometimes classified as 'female' rather than simply as 'divine', and myths involving goddesses sometimes address social issues such as the definition of gender roles.³⁰ Myths also relate to local rituals, but even so their interest is not merely aetiological, and they too have their own structure of meaning.³¹

One example of the way a myth can incorporate contemporary meanings is provided by the myth of Demeter and Persephone as told in the sixth-century BC *Hymn to Demeter*.³² The hymn tells of the seizure of Demeter's daughter Kore ('maiden') or Persephone by Hades, and Demeter's search for her. It has an oblique relation to the mysteries of Demeter and Persephone celebrated at Eleusis (below, pp. 102–7) in that the mourning Demeter disguised as an old woman is given hospitality by the king of Eleusis and, when she reveals her true identity, bids a temple to be built to her there and later teaches her secret mysteries to the leaders of the Eleusinians.³³ But the hymn is not a narrowly local aetiological myth; it concerns general Panhellenic themes. Demeter in her anger at the theft of Persephone prevented the crops from growing,

²⁹ Vernant 1982; Ogden 1997; Ginzburg 1990: 226–95 speculates on this pattern.

³⁰ Loraux 1992; below, pp. 98–100. ³¹ Introduction: Tyrrell and Brown 1991.

³² Parker 1991; compare below, p. 45 on Homeric Hymns. Trans. in Foley 1994 (or Loeb *Hesiod and Homeric Hymns*).

³³ Clinton 1992: 28–37 argues that the *Hymn* was an aetiology for the Thesmophoria, but this view does not account for the overall thrust of the piece.

an appropriate action by the deity whose name included the words Ge (earth) and Meter (mother) and whose specific sphere of responsibility was agriculture. The resulting famine would have led to the end of the human race and would hence have robbed the Olympians of the rites offered to them by mortals. That roused Zeus to action and he persuaded Hades to let Persephone return to her mother and the Olympians, though by a ruse Hades ensured that she would stay with him under the earth for a third of each year. The power of the female god was immense, but it was ultimately circumvented by that of the male gods. An analogy is established between the fertility of Demeter and that of the soil with a further suggestion that her mysteries were connected with human mortality and afterlife.³⁴

LOCAL MYTHS

The Panhellenic myths of Homer, Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns also had their local versions which either rooted the myths in the local community or elaborated significantly different versions of the myth. Local myths might concern the Olympians or they might relate to a further order of beings, 'heroes', normally conceived as mortals who had died and who received cult at their tomb or at a specific sanctuary. Heroes were very numerous (in Attica alone over 170 heroes were worshipped). They ranged from major Attic heroes like Erechtheus or Kekrops, worshipped in the Erechtheion on the Akropolis, down to minor and sometimes even anonymous heroes worshipped only in a particular deme (like Hyttenios at Marathon, or Heros Iatros, the hero physician, near the Athenian Agora).³⁵

Pausanias' *Guide book* is a wonderful repository of the stories told to him in the second century AD and thus a neat refutation of the view that the Greeks somehow outgrew mythology with the growth of 'rational' thought.³⁶ For example, the Athenians told of a contest between Athena and Poseidon for the control of Attica; the event was depicted on the west pediment of the Parthenon (Fig. 2.2). Poseidon created with a blow of his trident a salt spring on the Akropolis, while Athena planted there the first ever olive tree. Athena was adjudged the victor, but Poseidon in pique flooded a plain north-west of Athens, until a final reconciliation was brought about. Athena Polias became the guardian deity of the city, but the mythical contest left its material remains (Fig. 2.3). The unique

³⁴ See Nixon 1995.

³⁵ Kearns 1989; 1992; Larson 1995.

³⁶ Veyne 1988.



Fig. 2.2. A montage of the west front of the Parthenon, Athens. In the pediment is a restoration of the sculpture showing (in the centre) the struggle between Athena (left) and Poseidon (right). On the left (after two unknown figures) are Kekrops, Pandrosos, Herse, Erysichthon and Aglauros. (No. 4 on Fig. 2.14.)

plan of the Erechtheion was due in part to the need to incorporate the spring within the building where Poseidon and Erechtheus, the second king of Athens, were both worshipped, and when Pausanias visited the Akropolis he was shown both the salt spring and the olive tree behind the Erechtheion, which had regenerated miraculously after the Persians had burned it in 480 BC.³⁷

³⁷ 1.26.5, 27.2; Herodotos 8.55. Parker 1987b. Below, p. 40, on the Akropolis.

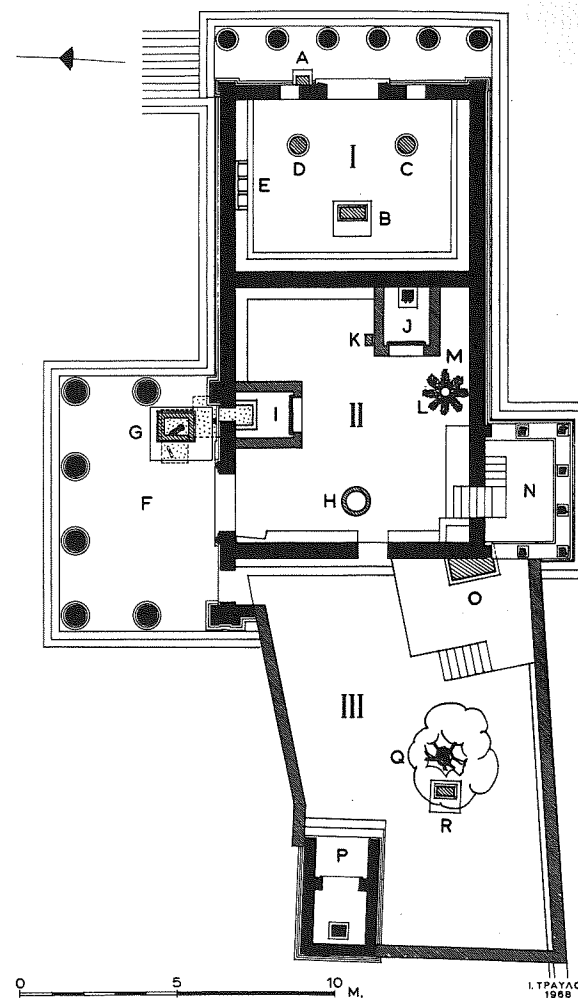


Fig. 2.3. Restored plan of the Erechtheion (421–405 BC) (No. 6 on Fig. 2.14).

- I Eastern section: A. Altar of Zeus Hypatos; B. Altar of Poseidon and Erechtheus; C. Altar of the Hero Boutes; D. Altar of Hephaistos; E. Thrones of the priests.
- II Western section: F. North porch; G. Altar of Thyechoos, with marks of the thunderbolt on the rocks below; H. Prostomiaion, salt sea and the trident marks; I. *Aduton* for the tomb of Erechtheus and the sacred snake; J. *Aduton* or *megaron* for the wooden cult statue of Athena Polias; K. Wooden statue of Hermes; L. Kallimachus' lamp with eternal fire and bronze palm tree chimney; M. Booty from the Persian Wars; N. Porch of the Maidens.
- III Pandroseion: O. Tomb of Kekrops; P. Temple of Pandrosos; Q. Olive tree of Athena; R. Altar of Zeus Herkeios.

A fine Athenian example of a local hero in action is the story of Theseus and the Amazons. The Painted Stoa built c. 460 BC on the north side of the Agora displayed on its rear wall two paintings of mythological and two of historical scenes, described by Pausanias: the Athenians and Theseus fighting the Amazons, the Greek victory at Troy, the Athenian victory over the Persians at Marathon in 490 BC and (according to Pausanias) the Athenian defeat of the Spartans at Oenoe.³⁸ The story of the conflict between Greeks and Amazons was well known in Greece, but in fifth-century Athens it received a specifically local twist. Theseus had acquired and brought back to Athens an Amazon bride (who bore him a son, Hippolytus). The Amazons invaded Attica, encamping on the Areopagos hill opposite the Akropolis. In a great battle Theseus then defeated the Amazons. The story grew with the 'discovery' of the bones of Theseus on the Aegean island of Skyros in 476/5 BC and their removal to Athens where they were buried in a sanctuary to Theseus somewhere near the Agora.³⁹ Theseus' defeat of the Amazons at Athens was depicted in a mural in that sanctuary and in carvings on the Akropolis, certainly on the shield of Athena's cult statue and probably on the reliefs on the west end of the Parthenon.⁴⁰ The story glorified Athens as the defender of civilised (male) values as a prototype for the Athenian resistance to Persia. Indeed Herodotos describing the battle of Plataia in 479 BC between the Greeks and the Persians made the Athenians claim a position of honour partly on the grounds of their great victory against the threatening female Amazons.⁴¹

Athens was far from unique in having locally rooted myths. All over the Greek world towns claimed to be the birthplace of X, or the favoured spot of Y.⁴² Ephesos, for example, offers a myth analogous to the Athenian one of Athena and Poseidon. The ancient cult of Artemis was central to the city's sense of communal identity. Pride was taken both in the local cult and in the fact that the deity was worshipped all over the Greek world. (Remember the cult in the Peloponnese described by Xenophon.) The point comes over most vividly in the confrontation

³⁸ Pausanias 1.15; Camp 1986: 66–72; Castriota 1992: 76–89. In fact Pausanias may have been misinformed about the otherwise unattested battle at Oenoe; the scene may rather have shown the marshalling of Athenian forces at the Attic village of Oenoe before Marathon.

³⁹ Koumanoudis 1976; Castriota 1992: 33–63.

⁴⁰ Theseion: Pausanias 1.17.2. Cf. Barron 1972, esp. 33–40 for alleged influence of the painting on vase-paintings. Parthenon: Castriota 1992: 143–51.

⁴¹ 9.27. Amazons on the Athenian treasury at Delphi: Robertson 1975: 167–70. Amazons and Theseus: Dubois 1982; Tyrrell 1984; Tyrrell and Brown 1991: 159–88; John Hendersøn 1994; Blok 1995; Walker 1995; Parker 1996: 168–70; Mills 1997.

⁴² See, for example, Chuvin 1987 on Hierapolis and Lindner 1994 on Nysa.



Fig. 2.4. Part of frieze from temple of Artemis and Hadrian, Ephesos (early fourth century AD). Greeks under Herakles (marked by his club and lion's cape) scare off four Amazons, who seek sanctuary with Artemis (on block to right, not preserved).

dramatised in the Acts of the Apostles when Paul preached in the theatre at Ephesos only to be shouted down by the crowd chanting 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.'⁴³ Not only was Ephesos guardian of a unique image of Artemis, which had supposedly fallen from heaven, but Ephesos also claimed that Artemis had been born there (and not as was often claimed on the Aegean island of Delos). The Ephesians also sometimes claimed that her cult had been established by Amazons, who thus sometimes had a much more positive significance at Ephesos than at Athens (Fig. 2.4).⁴⁴ The benevolence of Artemis towards the Amazons is also illustrated in the local story of how the Amazons successfully sought refuge in the sanctuary of Artemis, both from Herakles and from Dionysos.⁴⁵ Artemis remained the protector both of the Amazons and of the city right through antiquity.

Some local myths did not simply invoke Panhellenic deities in actions affecting particular communities, they offered a refraction of the

⁴³ Acts of the Apostles 19.23–41; Oster 1976.

⁴⁴ Birth: Strabo 14.1.20; Appendix no. 15. Rogers 1991: 68–9, 144–51. Amazons: Bammer 1976, though the 'tradition' was disputed (Weiss 1984: 201 n.52).

⁴⁵ Fleischer in Bammer 1974: 78–82; Price 1984a: 255–6. Other scenes in LIMC 1.603 no. 249, 1.765 nos. 1 and 4. On city foundations see Tacitus, *Annals* 4.55–6; Weiss 1984; below, p. 156.



Fig. 2.5. Seizure of Persephone by mature, bearded Hades.

Panhellenic deity through the lens of local concerns. For Greek gods existed at both the Panhellenic and the local level, and the Panhellenic structures of the pantheon varied with different local selections and emphases. Though all accepted the ultimate supremacy of Zeus, the view from Athens or Ephesos where Athena and Artemis were the chief civic deities looked very different. The case of the cult of Persephone at the Greek city of Locri in southern Italy illustrates the point very nicely.⁴⁶ Seven series of clay relief plaques from the first half of the fifth century BC have been found in the sanctuary of Persephone at Locri (Figs. 2.5–2.8). The scenes depicted and particular symbols in them not only reflect the Panhellenic myth of Persephone's seizure by Hades, but moreover emphasise her sphere by extending it into that of marriage, which was in other Greek cities normally under the protection of Hera. One series adds an entirely new dimension to the cult, namely

⁴⁶ Sourvinou-Inwood 1978. For data see also Prückner 1968.

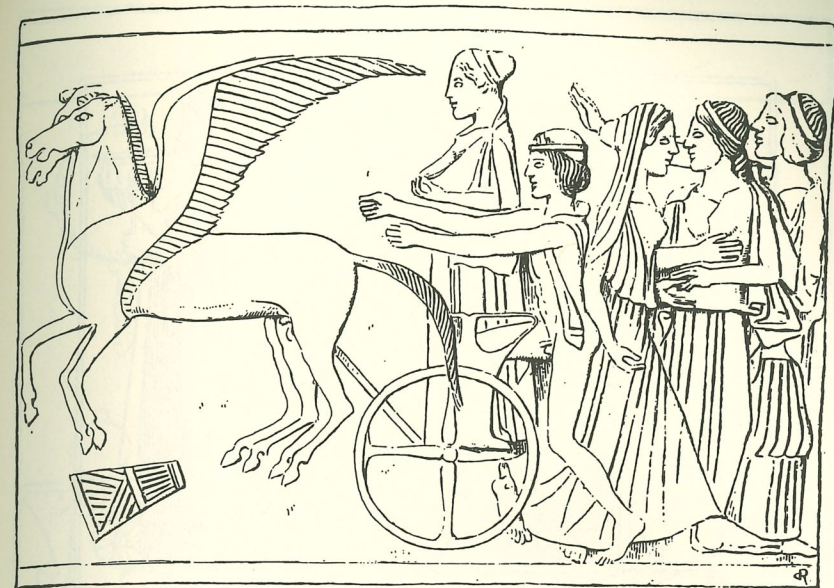


Fig. 2.6. Girl voluntarily entering chariot of young man; her female friends say goodbye. This series may have been dedicated by women on marriage.

Persephone as a protector of children (as Demeter was elsewhere). At Locri Persephone lacks the usual Panhellenic association with Demeter, but has incorporated the spheres of marriage and children, that is those female activities which were central to the community.

FESTIVALS AND SACRIFICES

For the Greeks, one way of dealing with the multiplicity of their gods was a firm structure of various calendars of festivals and sacrifices.⁴⁷ For us, however, the 'Greek Calendar' is something of a nightmare, because the names of the months varied in the different ethnic regions of Greece, and because the alignment of lunar and solar years by intercalation (as our 29 February) was done haphazardly by different cities. However, there were some common principles. There were twelve months, each divided into three groups of ten days; the individual months were generally named after a festival celebrated during that month: Lenaeon was

⁴⁷ Deubner 1932 is the basic study (in German) of Attic festivals. Parke 1977 and E. Simon 1983 offer introductions in English, though both works are unsatisfactory in their interpretations. Neils 1992 and 1996 include good studies of one festival, the Panathenaia.